



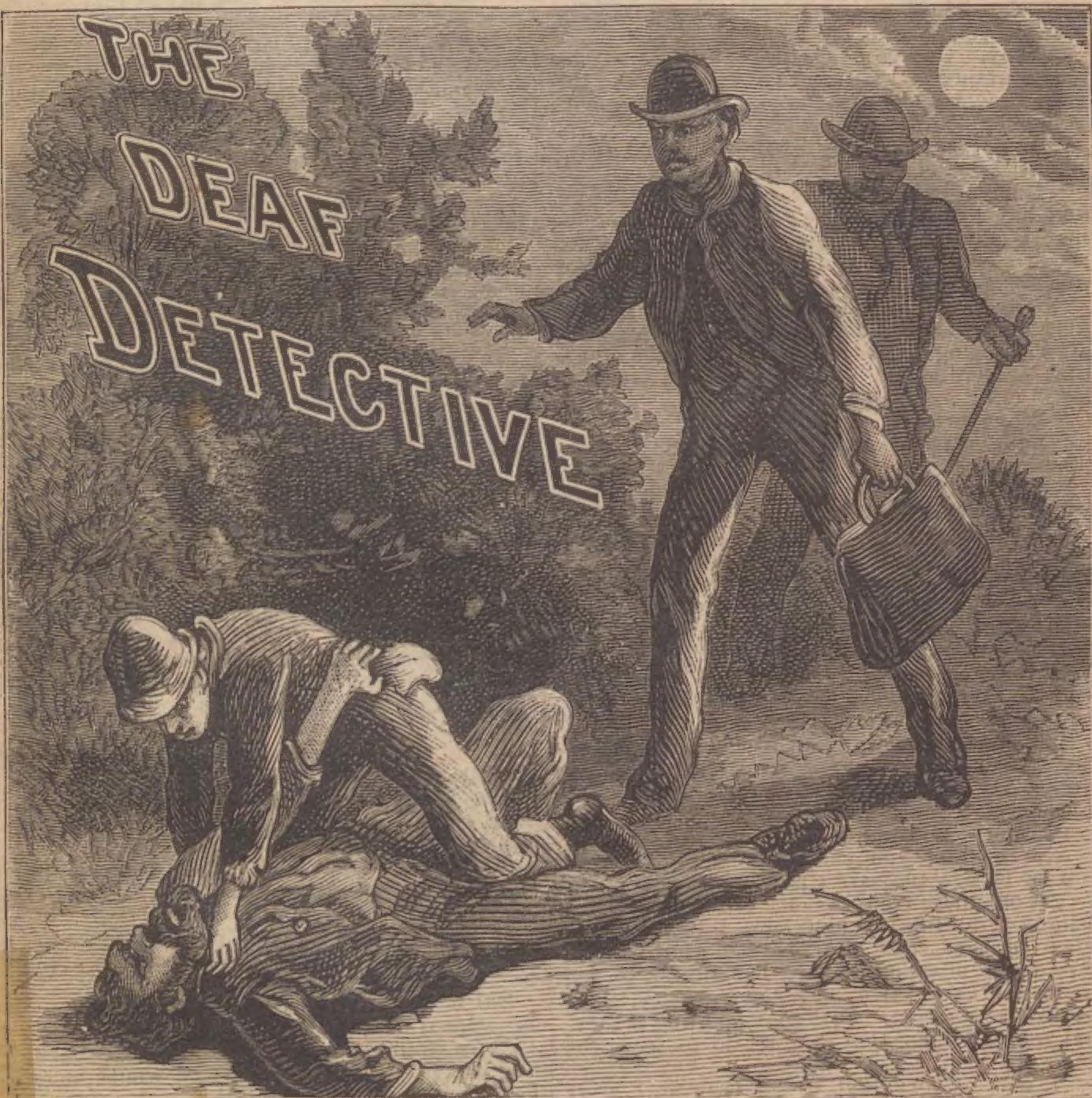
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THE BIG VAGABOND FELL BACKWARD ON THE GROUND, WITH THE BOY ON TOP.

The Deaf Detective;

OR,

WEASEL, THE BOY TRAMP.

BY EDWARD WILLETT,
AUTHOR OF "FEATHERWEIGHT, THE BOY SPY,"
"THE BOY CHAMPION," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. SUDDENLY DEAD.

A TALL and well-formed young man, plainly but neatly dressed, stepped out of the *Evening Post* building in New York, one summer afternoon, and headed toward the nearest Elevated Railway Station.

As he reached the other side of Broadway he was slapped on the shoulder and accosted by another young man.

"Why, George Lumley!" exclaimed his acquaintance. "Where have you been for this long time, and what have you been doing with yourself?"

"Just jogging along at the same old trot," replied Lumley.

"I have been wanting to see you, George, and have wondered why you hadn't looked me up. I have not forgotten the business you spoke to me about, and you can have a sit on the *Herald* now, if you want it."

"I am very much obliged to you, Al, and must confess that I don't deserve your kindness after treating you so shabbily. But the fact is that I have made a change since I saw you last."

"What sort of a change?"

"I am boarding at home and lodging at the same place."

"You don't mean to say that you have gone and got married?"

"Not quite so bad as that," replied Lumley. "But I am living out of town, and my sister Clara is keeping house for me. We are orphans, you know, and must stick together and help each other, and she is by all odds the best and dearest girl I have yet come across."

"I remember meeting her several years ago," said the other. "She was a little thing then, but a very sweet and pretty child."

"She has grown up to be ever so much prettier and sweeter. But you must come out and see us, Al. We have a real nice little bit of a house near Yonkers, with flowers and trees and grass, and everything lovely. We are as snug as can be, and you can't have any idea, until you see it, how pleasant Clara makes the place. To get out there from the city is the one great delight of my life. It is because I have settled down in that style that I don't want to stick type on a morning paper, but prefer to jog along at the old trot. I make less money, but have more comfort. Just come out and see me, and you will agree that it won't do to give the thing up."

"I will be very glad to go, George. Your hours don't suit me; but I can put a sub on some night, and take a run up to Yonkers with you."

"All right. That will please me to a dot, and Clara will be glad to see you. Drop me a note to let me know when you can get off, or call around at the Post, and I will take you to the Chateau de Lumley. Good-by, Al! I must hurry to catch my train."

Light-hearted George Lumley hastened away, and solid Al Benedict looked after him.

"As good and true a fellow as ever lived," mused the latter. "I'll warrant that his sister is as fair as a rose and as sweet as a peach. As soon as I can get off I will take them in."

When he stepped from the train that had carried him as nearly as possible to his destination, George Lumley noticed among those who boarded the cars at the station a well-dressed young man who carried a small valise, and who was evidently excited. He had the appearance of one who had hurried to catch the train, and yet it was plain that he had not at that moment reached the station.

It was this young man's anxiety to get off that attracted George Lumley's attention to him; but he thought no more about him as the train rolled away.

He had to walk a considerable distance to reach his home; but he was fond of walking, and the route was a pleasant one, and it was cheering to think of Clara's welcome and her bright supper-table.

After leaving the village he struck into a country road, and followed it about a quarter of a mile. Then he turned aside into a path that led through a piece of woods, affording him a short cut to his house.

It was near sunset, there was no breeze stirring, and the air in the little forest was close and heavy; but the shade was agreeable, and the abundant green foliage was a treat to one who had just emerged from that wilderness of brick and mortar known as New York.

George Lumley walked on briskly and cheerfully, and his heart was full of thankfulness for the blessings life gave him, although it had taken so much from him.

At about the middle of the grove the path descended slightly to the bed of a little stream, then dried up, and in the hollow at the left was a moist spot which had been a small pond.

At the edge of that spot, among the weeds and bushes, Lumley saw something that made him stop and turn pale.

It had the appearance of a woman's dress, of a light, striped material.

His heart flew up into his throat, a deadly fear came over him, and his limbs shook beneath him until he could scarcely stir.

His sister Clara had such a dress, and she often sauntered down that path to meet him when he returned from the city.

If the dress had been in motion, or in a natural position, there would have been nothing to frighten him.

But it was prone upon the ground, and nothing stirred its quiet folds.

Clara would have seen him as he approached, and her sweet and merry voice would at once have been raised to greet him.

But there was not the least sound to break the deathlike stillness of that shady, tranquil grove.

George Lumley moved forward slowly, dragging his feet, rather than carried by them, and at every step his dreadful doubt became a sickening certainty.

It was Clara's dress.

It was a woman who lay there motionless, and never to move.

It was Clara herself, and she was dead!

She lay on her side, with her face toward him. Her right hand, stretched out, held a few wild flowers, and her left hand was thrown across her breast, where there was a horrible stain on the light fabric of her dress—a stain of blood!

Summoning all his strength and resolution, he approached her, and bent over her.

Her body was yet warm, but she was dead, quite dead, and a wound in her breast from which blood had flowed plentifully showed what had caused her death.

She had been shot through the heart.

Lumley staggered to his feet, and hurried away. His brain reeled, and he had no definite purpose except that of seeking help. He ran through the wood, and reached a cottage at the end of the path. This cottage adjoined his own, and he was well acquainted with its occupants.

At the front door he sunk in a swoon, and fell heavily upon the porch, unable to declare his needs or to ask assistance.

Fortunately he was seen as he came up the walk, and his fall was heard; but the accident caused delay, as no one could guess what was the matter with him.

While his friends were busy in restoring him to his senses, one of them hastened to his house to bring his sister to his help, but brought back the news that the house was locked, and Miss Lumley was not to be found. Then it began to be surmised that something had happened to Clara.

This suspicion was confirmed by the first words he uttered as soon as he was sufficiently recovered to speak.

"It is Clara," he answered, in reply to friendly questions. "She is dead—murdered—down there in the grove."

More help was summoned, and Lumley, as soon as he could walk, led his friends and neighbors down the path to the spot where he had found his sister's body. It was still there and had not been disturbed.

He told how he had found it, and a physician who had come with the party stepped forward to make an examination, though it was too plain that the murdered woman was beyond medical help.

"Wait a moment!" exclaimed Lumley, as a sudden thought struck him.

He remembered that he had noticed some tracks in the soft soil near the body, and he wished to inspect them, as they might afford a possible clew to the murderer.

In the twilight that followed the setting sun he examined those tracks carefully, and counted them. They were a few footmarks, made by the shoe or boot of some man who had a small foot and was well shod.

With the assistance of the physician, he measured them, and made memoranda of the mea-

surements. Then he saw another mark that drew from him an eager exclamation.

In the dark and moist earth where the little pond had been, was the imprint of a hand. It was a left hand, and doubtless a man's hand, though it was a small one. The peculiarity of this impression, aside from its small size, was the fact that the little finger was missing from the second joint, the figure in the earth showing exactly how much of that member had been lost.

This mark was also carefully measured and recorded, and the physician promised the young man that he would return and take a cast of the impression.

"Go on and make your examination," said Lumley. "I know the worst now, and am cool enough."

The wound was speedily examined, and the physician declared that it had been made by a pistol bullet, which had pierced the girl's heart, and had lodged near her spine. No further examination could be made, except by order of the coroner.

While some of the party went for a cot that was to serve as a stretcher, Lumley and the others carefully searched the vicinity for signs that could indicate how or by whom the dead girl had been shot down; but they found nothing more. There was nothing to speak of a struggle, and no pistol or other weapon could be discovered.

Suicide was quite out of the question, and it could only be said that Clara Lumley had been secretly and foully murdered, for some unknown reason, by some person unknown.

CHAPTER II. MORE MYSTERIES.

THE inquest that was held upon the body of Clara Lumley disclosed no further facts of importance, and her murder remained as great a mystery as when she was discovered by her brother.

She had had no enemy as far as was known. How could such a sweet and amiable girl have had an enemy? Nor had she had any very intimate friends. Her kind and obliging disposition had made friends for her wherever she went; but no person could ever have been justified in calling himself her lover.

Although he was quite sure that she never had any secrets from him, George had searched carefully among her belongings for some letter or scrap of paper or token that might give a clew to the cause of her cruel fate. The search had caused him many a tear, and he had found nothing. No bit of writing that had in any respect the appearance of a love-letter had she left behind her.

The suggestion at first thrown out, that some discarded suitor might have sought to avenge himself upon her for his disappointment, was necessarily thrown aside.

Yet her murderer must have seen and faced her, as she was shot in the breast, with an aim that could not have been made more fatal.

Robbery had not been the motive of the murderer, as she had nothing of value about her, except a little plain jewelry, which was in her person when she was found dead in the grove.

She had evidently locked up her cottage, put the key of the front door in her pocket and walked down the path through the grove to meet her brother, who was always regular in his time of returning from the city. At the dry bed of the little pond she had stopped to gather some wild blossoms, and it must have been while she was thus employed that she was stricken down, shot through the heart.

The murderer was no tramp, but a person who could afford to wear a fine shoe or boot, as the tracks showed. The tracks also showed that he had examined his victim after firing the fatal shot, and had made sure that the horrid work had been thoroughly done before he left the spot.

If there was any person upon whom a shadow of suspicion could have been thrown, it was her brother, who was the only person known to have been in the grove that evening. But such a thought was too abhorrent and improbable to be for a moment entertained by anybody. They were not only brother and sister, but were noted for their brotherly and sisterly affection. They were known to be orphans, and all the world to each other. Their neighbors were sure that a cross word could never have been spoken between them. The physician was confident that she had been shot down before the train that brought George from the city could have reached the depot. And there in the soft soil, were the tracks of the man who must have been the murderer, and the tell-tale print of his left hand.

There was no person in the neighborhood who was known to have lost the little finger of the left hand, and no such person had been seen in the vicinity of the grove.

The coroner and the police did all they could do, and no effort was left untried to find a clew to the criminal; but everybody was utterly at a loss.

"Murdered by some person unknown to the jury," was the only verdict that could be rendered, and the sudden death of Clara Lumley continued to be a mystery.

The bullet that pierced her heart had been extracted, and it was given to her brother after the inquest. It was a pistol-bullet of large caliber, and had lost but little of its shape or weight, and the size and style of the weapon could easily be determined by experts.

George Lumley did not lack for sympathy in his great affliction. He had not supposed that he had so many friends until this sorrow brought them out. During his brief residence in that suburb he and his sister, and especially Clara, who was better known among the neighbors, had endeared themselves to not a few, and offers of consolation and practical assistance came to him abundantly from sources where he would not have looked for them. His way was made as smooth as possible, and his sister's remains were largely attended to the grave.

But he could stay there no longer. The cottage was empty after Clara's death, and everything reminded him of her too painfully. He determined to get rid of his household treasures, which had been treasures only while his sister was there to enjoy them, and to go far away

from the spot which had for so short a time been a little Paradise to him.

For this purpose he must see his landlord, who was a near neighbor, and abandon his lease.

He knew little of this gentleman, Mr. Frederick Lyster, except that he was a childless widower, who seemed to be possessed of a comfortable independence. He had been kind to his young tenants; but George Lumley was diffident about asking such a favor as the canceling of his lease, which had the better part of a year to run.

He was put at his ease as soon as Mr. Lyster invited him into the house.

"I think I can guess what you have come for," said that gentleman. "You want to give up the cottage you have rented from me and go away."

"You are a good guesser," replied George. "If I can compromise the matter in any way—"

"No compromise will be needed. You have met with a great misfortune here, and I want to make your way as easy as I can. I am quite willing that you should give up the house, and I can easily find a tenant for it. What are you going to do with your household stuff? Had you thought of selling it at auction?"

George replied that such was his intention.

"It would be a pity to sacrifice it in that way. Perhaps you had better let me take it off your hands at a fair valuation. I can save myself on it, as I need be in no hurry to sell."

"You are very kind indeed, Mr. Lyster," said the young man. "I could not have expected that you would be so liberal to me, of whom you know so little."

"I know how to feel for you, my young friend, as I have had a great deal of trouble of my own. Indeed, though your trouble is a great one, mine is much greater. You know that your sister is dead, and you can visit her grave. You have at least the consolation of certainty. But I do not know what fate has befallen my lost ones, or whether they are in this world or the next."

"What have you lost, Mr. Lyster?" asked George.

"Everything that is worth having. You see me here alone in the world with no one to care for; yet I had a loving wife and two children who were very dear to me. I know that my wife is dead, but my children—where are they? I only know that they are gone."

Lumley ventured to ask how they were lost.

"I wish I knew. That would be a little satisfaction. About a year after I moved into this house, and a year before the death of my wife, my little daughter Lena—a bright child of five—was missed from her home one day. That is all I know about it. She simply disappeared, vanished as if she had melted into the air. I caused all the country about here to be thoroughly searched, and every river or brook or pond that she could possibly have reached was carefully dragged. I offered a large reward, and employed the best detective talent, but could never find the faintest trace of my lost child."

"That stroke killed my wife. She died within a year, and a little more than a year after her

death I received another blow. My son Willie, a little fellow hardly big enough to toddle about, disappeared in the same way. He was missing—spirited away—and I could not even guess what had become of him. Again I used all the means at my disposal; but my best efforts were unavailing, and from that day to this I have never heard of my two children."

"Perhaps you had an enemy," suggested Lumley.

"There was only one man I knew of who could have had any cause to dislike me. That was a former partner of mine, named Joseph Blackman. I had trusted a great deal to him, and in time I discovered that he was swindling me heavily. His swindling was so mean and shameful that I exposed him and had him arrested; but he escaped punishment under a technicality, and cleared out. Then I retired from business, and shortly after my retirement my misfortunes began."

"Do you know what became of him, sir?"

"He went to one of the Western States and settled down on a farm. I sent a detective out there and spent considerable money in watching him, as he was the only person whom I could suspect; but nothing could be discovered that would connect him in any way with the disappearance of my children."

George Lumley was so deeply interested in Mr. Lyster's story of his great losses that for the time he forgot his own affliction and put his sympathy into a few words that came right from the heart.

"That is not all," said Mr. Lyster. "I have just received another blow. Having deprived me of my family, the fates, or whatever my pursuers may be, have struck at my property. That is a small matter, compared with my other losses; but it seems to me to show a settled purpose to ruin me. There is a considerable piece of property near mine which I have long wished to own. The county records showed that it belonged to a non-resident named Jones, and I advertised for him but heard nothing from him. Lately he turned up, with the avowed purpose of looking after his property and paying the taxes on it. I heard of his arrival, saw him and made him an offer for the property. He asked a heavy price, but at last we came to terms. I paid him for the land fully as much as it was worth, and took his deed properly executed and acknowledged.

"I did not record the deed immediately, as I ought to have done, but went to New York, where I had some pressing business, leaving the deed locked in the desk you see in this room. That was the same day on which your sister was murdered. I returned from the city in the evening, by the train following that which brought you. I was excited by your trouble and did not go home until a late hour. Even then I did not look for the deed, and when I opened the desk in the morning it was gone."

"Was it stolen?" asked Lumley.

"No doubt of that. I had left no one at home but my housekeeper, an old woman who is very hard of hearing, and I believe it was stolen during my absence, as I doubt if this house could have been entered without my knowledge while I was here."

"But you can prove that the deed was executed and acknowledged."

"That is just what I cannot do. The next day, after I had searched the house thoroughly, I called on the justice of the peace who had taken the acknowledgment, but he was dead. He had died suddenly that morning of heart disease."

"It was fate," said the young man.

"Everything is fated, I suppose; but I am convinced that behind this fate there was some devilish human will. The death of the justice of the peace may be called fate; but there was a purpose in the stealing of my deed. Let it pass, Mr. Lumley. I have only spaken of these matters to show you that I can sympathize with you in your afflictions. I have been robbed of a large portion of my property; but I had no children to inherit it. What do you propose to do, my young friend?"

"I shall stick to my trade, of course, for the sake of a living, but I mean to travel over the country, and will not feel like stopping long in one place. Perhaps in my wanderings I may come across the man who killed my sister."

Mr. Lyster shook his head.

"But I have a clew," urged Lumley. "I have the measurement of his foot and the print of his hand, and the bullet from his pistol. And I saw something at the station that evening as I landed that set me to thinking."

"What was that?" asked Mr. Lyster.

Lumley told of the well-dressed young man, carrying a valise, who had been in such a hurry to board the up-train, and who had frequently come into his memory since his sister's death.

"That must be merely a fancy," said his new friend. "Young men of that class are continually coming and going, and of course some of them must be in a hurry. It will be like looking for a needle in a haystack, to try to match the prints of that foot and that hand; but, if you travel far, and see many people, there is just a chance."

George Lumley was obliged to admit that the chance was very faint; but he could not help connecting the man he had seen at the station, not only with his sister's murder, but with Mr. Lyster's recent loss.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE TRAMP.

A YOUNG man was slowly trudging along a dusty road in Southern Indiana. Any one who had ever seen him would easily have recognized the intelligent face and fine form of George Lumley, in the role of a detective.

He carried an unattractive carpet-bag slung over his shoulder at the end of a stick, and a person not thoroughly acquainted with the distinctive features of tramps would have set him down as one of those pests of rural districts.

But even such a person would have perceived his mistake when he contrasted the young man with a genuine specimen of the tribe, as he soon might have done.

Turning a bend in the road, Lumley came upon two undoubted tramps, a man and a boy, seated in the shade of a spreading oak.

The man had "all the symptoms" of the class

to which he belonged. He was not shoeless, but the scraps of old leather that passed for shoes seemed ready to drop from his feet, and his upper garments were in not much better condition, while his beard and hair were shaggy and unkempt, and his face and hands appeared to be quite unacquainted with soap and water.

The boy might have been fourteen or fifteen years old, but there was a look of premature age in his pinched face that made his appearance deceptive. He was barefooted, and his only garments were a pair of ragged trowsers slung by one suspender, a torn and dirty shirt, and the remains of an old straw hat.

Both were busy gnawing at bones and scraps of meat, which they took from a dirty rag, and the man was getting the lion's share of the scanty meal.

Lumley approached them, moved partly by compassion and partly by curiosity, unslung his carpet-bag and opened it.

"Suppose I help you to a little better dinner than that," he said, and both looked up at him in surprise.

He took from a paper four substantial sandwiches, divided them equally between the two tramps, and sat down to rest.

They devoured the bread and meat ravenously, and then Lumley took a flask from his pocket, filled a small tin cup with liquor, and handed it to the man, who swallowed it with a gulp, without offering a taste to the boy.

"You're what I call the right sort, mister," he said, as he wiped his mouth with his ragged coat-sleeve. "We don't come across the likes of you of'en. But you've gi'n us all your grub."

"I didn't want it," replied Lumley.

"W'ot'll you do fur a dinner, then?"

"I am going on to the next town, and will pick up what I want there."

"How'll you git it?"

"I have a shilling or two left, and can buy it."

"A shillin', hey? You're an Eastern man, I reckon. Air you on the tramp?"

"I am what is known as a tramping jour.," Lumley answered.

"Oh, a printer! You ain't no sort of a professional outside o' that, are you?"

"I believe not."

"Cause we all have our ups an' downs, and some of the chaps w'ot comes along ain't above pickin' up little things that they find layin' around loose. If you was on that lay, and wanted to make a big raise, I mought let you into a good thing, what you mought call a soft and wearthy snap."

"What is it?" asked Lumley.

"Thar's a house not fur from here that stands off to itself, and that's easy to git into—no dogs—and thar's piles of money in it, as I've been told. I ain't pressin' this thing onto you—I've got a pardner on the beat about here, who will be glad to go in with me; but you've showed a Christian heart, and I want to treat you like a Christian."

"I haven't got to be that kind of a Christian yet," replied the young man, as he rose from

the grass. "Good-day, my friend. I am going on to Vinson."

"I don't take no Vinson in mine," declared the man. "They are powerful hard on tramps thar."

"I don't believe they will bother me," remarked the young man, "as I am looking for work."

"So am I, and I'm nigh skeered to death fur fear I'll find it. That's w'ot's the matter with me. So long, young man!"

The boy had not said a word during this dialogue, but had kept his eyes fastened on George Lumley's pleasant face, and he looked after him wistfully as he went away.

The young printer trudged along the dusty road, but had not gone far from the spot where he left the two tramps, when he heard sounds of screaming and cursing behind him.

Looking back, he saw the boy running toward him, followed at a little distance by the man who was brandishing a stick. The boy seemed to be frightened nearly out of his wits, and the man was loudly threatening to break every bone in his body.

George Lumley was not the kind of person who would quietly stand by and see a little fellow abused, and he thought that the time had come when he must organize himself into a society for the prevention of cruelty to children.

The boy seemed to pluck up courage at the sight of Lumley. He ran faster, and in a few moments sheltered himself behind the young man.

"Please don't let him beat me!" he exclaimed, almost breathlessly. "I'm 'feard he'll kill me."

"All right, bub," replied Lumley, as he dropped his carpet-bag and stick to the ground, while he put his hand in his hip pocket, where it rested on the butt of a pistol.

"Now I've got you, you young scalawag!" shouted the man. "Now I'll give you such a lambastin' as'll make you wish you was never bornd!"

"Halt, there!" ordered Lumley. "What is the matter with you?"

The man slackened his speed, but still came on.

"I want that young brat," he cried. "I owe him a whalin', and mean to give it to him."

"Not just now. Better bank your fires and let your boiler cool."

"You cl'ar the track or you'll git hurt, too," retorted the tramp. "Thar's blood in my eye."

He flourished his stick and came on, but stopped suddenly as he stared into the muzzle of a cocked revolver.

"Is this your son?" asked Lumley.

"None o' your business," sulkily replied the tramp.

"No, I ain't," said the boy. "He ain't notbin' to me, 'cept he makes me go on the tramp with him, and beats me like sin."

"He's my 'printice," remarked the man.

"Queer sort of a master you are," replied Lumley. "Do you want to go with him, bub?"

"No, I don't, mister. He swore he'd kill me, just a little bit ago, and I won't never go back to him no more, not if I die for it."

"Come along with me, then. I don't believe you belong to him, and you are not fat enough to kill, anyhow."

"I'll git even with you for this, you cussed fly-by-night!" exclaimed the tramp, and he sent after the two a red-hot stream of oaths, which grew stronger and louder as they increased their distance from him.

But George Lumley walked right along, paying no attention to the storm of abuse. He was thinking of something else just then, and it had occurred to him that he had an elephant on his hands.

The elephant was a small one, to be sure, but the question of what he should do with it was quite as serious as if it had been bigger. The young printer had not thought of this when he took the little fellow from the tramp; but the problem soon pressed upon him, and he began to question the boy.

"If that man is not your father, who is he?" he asked.

"He's a reg'lar tramp," replied the boy, "and they call him Three-fingered Jack."

"Why do they give him that name?"

"Cause he ain't got but three fingers on his left hand. The little finger's gone."

The typo was startled. In the course of his wanderings he had not yet met a man who was maimed in that manner, although he had noticed the hands of a great many men. For a moment he was half inclined to turn back and renew his acquaintance with Three-fingered Jack. But it was impossible that the broad-handed tramp, with his big, flat feet, could be the same person whose delicate foot and hand-prints had been left in the soft soil where Clara Lumley was murdered. Surely it was not worth while to pursue him, thought Lumley, as he walked on.

"How long have you been with him?" he asked.

"Two winters, and nigh onto two summers," answered the boy.

"Where did you come from?"

"Didn't come from nowhar in partic'lar."

"Who brought you up?"

"Nobody, as I knows on."

"But you must have been brought up somehow and by somebody."

"Reckon I was kicked up, mister."

"It does look as if that was the way of it. You seem to be on my hands now, bub, and I must confess that I don't know what to do with you. What is your name?"

"Weasel."

"That is no name at all. Is there nothing more?"

"Thar was some folks w'ot usened to call me Perry Wessel; but it's got to be mos'ly Weasel, and Three-fingered Jack he never called me nothin' but Weasel."

"Weasel it must be, then, or Perry. Why did you run away from Three-fingered Jack today?"

"Well, mister, the fact is that he was gwine to crack a crib to-night, 'long with a chap called Buck, who's a sort o' pardner o' his'n, and he told me that he was gwine to take me along to help. But I was skeered at it, and didn't want 'o be put through no windy at night. So I up and said I wouldn't do it, and he said I should, and I said I'd run awy first. Then he said he'd teach me suthin, and made a grab at me and missed me. Then he up with his stick, and swore he'd

break every bone in my body, and I broke and run like a quarter hoss until I cotched up with you, mister."

"You may call me Mr. Lumley, bub. Do you know where the crib is that he meant to crack?"

"Oh, yes. It's Mr. Blackman's house, 'bout two mile this side o' Vinson. It's a big place, that is, and thar's sure to be dorgs."

Here was another coincidence that startled the detective. He remembered that his friend, Frederick Lyster, in speaking of his afflictions, had mentioned a man named Blackman as the possible cause of his losses. Blackman had pmigrated to a Western State, and here, in Indiana the young typo had for the first time encountered a man of that name. Yet it could not be called an uncommon name, and there might be nothing in the coincidence.

"Perhaps that was the chance that Three-fingered Jack offered me this morning," he said.

"I reckon it was, Mr. Lumley."

"Now, Weasel, I will tell you what we are going to do. You shall show me the way to Mr. Blackman's place, and we will tell him of the job that was put up to crack his crib. Do you understand?"

"Bet I do. But I'm skeered. They moight take a notion to shet me up as one o' Jack's pals."

"I won't let them do that, bub. I will see that you are straight with the law."

"But ef Jack should ever git hold on it, he'd make pot-pie of this chicken."

"I will stand between you and him, too. You are going to be on the honest lay after this, Weasel, and to get a right start you will have to do this thing. But there is one point that may bother you a little, and I want you to get hold of it at once. I am going to be deaf and dumb."

The boy opened his eyes, and stared at his new protector and preceptor.

"What do you mean by that, Mr. Lumley?"

"I mean that after this I am to be deaf and dumb—can't hear or speak a word. You know what that is?"

"Yaas; but how am I ever gwine to talk to you?"

"I don't know how we will manage that. I wish you could read and write."

"Read and write?" joyfully exclaimed the boy. "You jest bet I kin do that. I chores for a school-marm onctet, quite a while, and she tort me a heap. But she got to whalin' me more'n I liked, and I run off."

Lumley drew from under his vest a small slate and a pencil, attached to a string around his neck, and made the boy sit down and write. Weasel's spelling was pretty bad, and he labored at his writing, as if long out of practice; but, as the typo assured him, he "made a fair fist of it."

"Now we will get along, bub," said Lumley, "if you will be sure to remember that I am deaf and dumb."

"All right, sir. But I'd like to know, Mr. Lumley, what sort of a lay you are on."

"Never mind that, Weasel. It is enough for you to know at present that it is a square and honest one."

CHAPTER IV DROPPING INTO A JOB.

MR. BLACKMAN'S house was, as Perry Wessel had described it, "a big place." That is to say, it was a fine house for that section of country. Yet it was only a good-sized square frame building, with no attempt at architectural beauty except a rather ugly bay window, and the grounds were neither well laid out nor well cared for.

George Lumley, in the role of Deaf Detective, entered the premises at the front gate, regardless of the barking of a big dog that was evidently chained.

"Better go 'round the back way, mister," advised the boy. "They'll git mad if we tackle the front door."

But the typo walked right on without seeming to hear this suggestion, and then Weasel suddenly remembered that his protector was deaf and dumb.

There was a bell-knob at the front door, and Lumley's vigorous pull was answered by a red-faced servant woman, who glared angrily at the two callers.

"No tramps wanted here!" she said, as she savagely ordered them away.

Lumley pointed at his mouth and ears, and shook his head, as if to make her understand his unfortunate condition. Then he took out his slate and pencil, and began to write.

The woman repeated her order, and threatened to turn the dog loose if they did not clear out.

"He ain't no tramp, missus," explained Weasel, thinking that the time had come for him to put in a word. "He don't know what you say. He's deaf and dumb."

"Take him away from here then," she replied. "We hain't got nothin' for the likes of him. There's the gate. Be off wid yez!"

"What's the matter, Bridget?"

This question came from the interior of the house, and was asked in clear and musical tones that made the typo's face brighten up.

"It's a pair o' tramps, Miss Lizzie—a big 'un and a little 'un—and they won't go away, and wan of them says he's deaf and dumb, and I don't belave a wurrud of it."

"If he is dumb, how can he tell you so?" asked the sweet voice, and the speaker stepped out into the hall.

She proved to be a graceful and pretty girl of sixteen or seventeen, nicely dressed, and with a merry smile on her face that well became her.

As she saw the young printer standing at the door, he did not have the appearance of an ordinary tramp, and there was an answering smile on his intelligent countenance.

"He don't look as if he means any harm, Bidly," she said, as she came forward. "What do you want, young man?"

The detective held out his slate, on which he had written these words:

"I wish to see Mr. Blackman on business of importance to him."

He wrote such a clear and neat running hand, that she was confirmed in her belief that he could not be a professional tramp.

"Wait a moment," she said, as she took the slate, "and I wi'l speak to my father."

Then, reflecting that the young man was deaf,

she waved her hand, accompanying the gesture with a smile.

She entered a room at the end of the hall, in which a tall man, with iron-gray hair, and partly bald, was seated at a desk, sorting some papers.

"What is it now, Lizzie?" he asked, without looking up.

"A man and a boy, sir, at the front door. Bridget said they were tramps, and wanted to drive them away. But one of them is deaf and dumb and he does not look like a regular tramp. It seems that he wants to see you particularly, and he wrote this on his slate."

"That is not the style of writing I would expect from a tramp," said the gentleman, as he read the two lines "I will go to the door, Lizzie, and see what he wants."

At the door his dark eyes, looking keenly from under shaggy brows, took in the young typo at a glance, and he wrote on the slate in a business-like hand.

"I am Mr. Blackman. What do you want?"

"I have something of importance to tell you; but it is hot out here and I am tired," wrote Lumley in reply.

Mr. Blackman motioned to the writer to follow him, and led the way toward the back room. There was a disposition to bar out Perry Weasel whose appearance was decidedly trampish, but Lumley took the slate and wrote:

"You need the boy. He can tell you more about the matter than I can."

So the two visitors were ushered into Mr. Blackman's private room, followed by the young lady, and were given seats, ragged and dirty Weasel being sent into a corner alone. Bridget looked in from the hall, and the expression of her red face showed her disapproval of the entire performance.

Lumley at once took his slate, and wrote these words:

"I have accidentally learned of a plan to rob your house to-night. If you will question this boy, he can tell you all about it."

Mr. Blackman proceeded to question the boy, who hesitated, stammered, and looked piteously at his protector, and Lumley hastened to remark on his slate that the boy was afraid of getting into trouble because he had been a companion of the man who planned the robbery.

Mr. Blackman assured the young tramp that no harm would come to him, and he began to tell the story in his own way. George Lumley was on thorns for fear that the sham of his deaf and dumb scheme would be discovered by carelessness of the boy in repeating conversations in which a deaf and dumb man could not have taken part. But Weasel had got it firmly fixed in his mind that his protector was to be deaf and dumb, and he passed through the ordeal splendidly, making no blunder, and giving no conversations but those between himself and the tramp master from whom he had run away.

Mr. Blackman asked the boy but a few questions, and turned to Lumley when the story was ended, nodding as if to let the typo know that he fully understood the matter. Then a slate conversation ensued between the two men.

"This is very important, if true," wrote Mr. Blackman. "I believe it, and will be on my guard. Who are you, and where are you going to?"

"My name is George Lumley, and I am a printer. I am going to Vinson to look for work."

"Do you expect to find work there?"

"There is always work for a good workman."

"That is the way to talk. My son is the publisher and editor of the Vinson *Vindictive*, and he wants a good hand. He will soon be here."

A brisk pull made the door-bell jingle sharply, and Mr. Blackman dropped the slate.

"There is Arthur!" he said. "Run to the door, Bridget, and let him in."

Mr. Arthur Blackman walked briskly to the back room. He was a tall and lithe young man, wearing a mustache and side whiskers, with dark eyes like his father's, and black hair. His face was a pleasing one, and the shade of melancholy that darkened it made it no less so.

He was surprised at the company he saw assembled in Mr. Blackman's room, and that gentleman hastened to explain the situation to him.

"All right," he said. "Forewarned is forearmed. We can easily take care of a couple of tramps, when we are on the lookout for them. This man is a printer, you say, sir? Deaf and dumb, too? That must be very unhandy for him. How am I going to talk to him?"

Mr. Blackman pointed to the slate. Arthur seized it, and questions and answers passed quickly between him and Lumley.

"Where are you from, and what can you do?" asked the proprietor of the *Vindictive*.

"From New York offices. I am a quick and correct type-setter, and a fair hand at job work."

"I pay thirty-five cents a thousand. I will try you on piece work, if you are willing."

"All right," replied the typo.

"How long will you stay if you suit me?"

"As long as I am suited."

The young gentleman read the last question and answer to his father.

"That is pretty independent," he said. "But he is in the right. Of course I won't keep him unless I am suited, and can't expect him to stay unless he is suited. But I am sick and tired of tramping hours, who only work long enough to get money for a spree, or to take them to the next town. I say, father, it is too late for this man to go on to Vinson this evening. Suppose we keep him here until morning, and then I will take him down in my buggy."

Mr. Blackman assented, and the proposition was communicated to Lumley, who gladly accepted. He was also informed that he could have a chance to wash and brush himself up, and this offer gave him yet more pleasure.

It seemed to be the prevalent opinion that Perry Wessel was beyond the reach of washing and brushing; but he was turned over to Bridget, who was directed to do what she could for him.

As George Lumley attended to his toilet, with

which he took all possible pains, it seemed to him that he was quite fortunate in dropping into a job, and in finding such a pleasant place to pass the night.

CHAPTER V.

THE TRAMPS' ATTACK.

SUPPER was ready when George Lumley had finished putting himself in order, and he had succeeded so well that there was nothing of the appearance of the tramp about him when he came down.

He was received with a smile and a friendly grasp of the hand by Arthur Blackman.

"Father," said that young gentleman, "Mr. Lumley is going to eat with us. He is quite a gentlemanly-looking young fellow. Don't you think so, Lizzie?"

"Indeed he is," replied the young lady, with a glance and a blush that would have conveyed her meaning to the young printer, even if he had not had the use of his ears.

As it was, the compliment sent a blush into his face, which he was obliged to cover with a sneeze.

"The boy," said Arthur, "is evidently a tramp, who will have to be provided for in the kitchen."

Then he seized the slate and asked Lumley what he expected to do with that boy.

"I shall try to take care of him and give him a fair start," was the reply.

"All right. I will help you. Sit down to supper."

Mr. Blackman took the head of the table, Lizzie poured out the tea, and Lumley and Arthur were seated opposite each other.

There was no difficulty in helping the deaf and dumb man at the table. The appetite is a ready interpreter, and his wants were easily supplied. He had evidently learned to read countenances and decipher expressions, and this faculty was quite noticeable in his intercourse with Lizzie Blackman, from whose glances and motions he appeared to take her meaning as well as if she had spoken.

"Really, Lizzie," said her brother, "you get on admirably with our deaf-mute friend, and I don't believe I shall have much trouble with him in the office. I am quite curious to get at his history and to find out how a deaf mute learned the printing business, but it is too much of a task to talk to him."

"Perhaps he can get at something of what we say by the motions of our lips," said Lizzie, who could not easily accustom herself to the idea of talking about a young man in his presence as if he was absent.

Then a strange circumstance happened to the guest. He suddenly dropped his knife and fork and stared steadily, with a look of horror, at Arthur Blackman—not at that young gentleman's face or at the portion of his body that was visible, but at his left hand, which he had chanced to hold up, with the back of it toward the table.

The little finger of that hand was missing!

"What is the matter?" asked Lizzie, and Mr. Blackman drew back and stared at his guest,

Arthur noticed the direction of Lumley's gaze, and pointed at his maimed hand with an inquiring look.

The typo picked up his knife and fork, but seemed to be unable to withdraw his eyes from that hand, and the look of horror deepened on his face.

Arthur Blackman seized the slate, on which he hastily wrote, "Born so," and handed it across the table.

Lumley read the words, and changed color as he became conscious of the notice his strange conduct had attracted. He continued his supper without raising his eyes from his plate.

"Queer fellow, that," said Arthur. "Who would have thought that such a little thing could frighten or shock anybody?"

"It is very strange," replied Mr. Blackman. "I hope he is not wrong in his head."

The sight of that maimed hand had startled George Lumley into a train of thought that made him forget for the moment where he was and what he was doing.

He was carried back at once to the twilight scene in the grove near Yonkers, where he had stood by the dead body of his murdered sister, and had seen in that soft soil the print of just such a maimed hand, with that of a small and shapely foot.

He had already noticed Arthur Blackman's feet, and they fitted the image in his mind, and there was the hand for which he had been seeking so long, over such a wide reach of country, and among such varied associations.

Was it possible that this pleasant, gentlemanly, and open-hearted young man was the villain who had slain his sister?

He also recalled the brief glimpses he had had of the well-dressed young man who had been so eager to board the train at the railway station on that fatal evening. He remembered him as tall and slim, like Arthur Blackman, but had carried away no impression of his features, except that he was sure that he had worn no beard of any sort.

But tall and slim young men, with small feet and hands, were plentiful enough, and there must be many who had lost the little finger of the left hand, though he had as yet met none of them but the tramp and Arthur Blackman.

Even if this should be the man he was hunting, his hand alone would never fasten the crime upon him, and it was necessary to learn the particulars of his past life, trusting to time and chance to worm his secret from him.

Lumley resolved that his stay in Vinson should not be a short one, that he would keep his faculties on the alert and that he would be careful to restrain any such emotion as might possibly give Arthur Blackman the alarm.

At bedtime a man who worked on the place was called in, to pass the night in the house, and Mr. Blackman and his son examined their weapons, of which they had a large supply. A pistol was offered to Lumley; but he showed his own, and shook his head.

The typo was sent to sleep in a large, garret-like room over the kitchen, which was an addition, or afterthought, at the rear of the square house. Perry Wessel was about to be sent to

the barn, but he begged to be allowed to remain with his protector.

"I'm afeard of the barn," he said, "and I don't want no bed nor nothin'. If I may sleep on the floor in Mr. Lumley's room, I'll be very, very thankful."

Lumley was informed of this wish, and readily agreed to it. So, when he went to bed, Weasel coiled himself up on a rug near the door.

The young typo was tired enough after his day's tramp, but sleep was in no hurry to visit his eyelids. His thoughts were full of two different objects—Lizzie Blackman's face and her brother's left hand—and it would be hard to decide which interested him the most deeply. He had never seen a face that attracted him so strongly, nor ever heard a voice that went to his heart so easily. It was hard to believe that the owner of such a face and such a voice could be the sister of a murderer, and Arthur Blackman did not look like a murderer, in spite of his tell-tale hand and foot. When he thought of Lizzie Blackman's face, he was ready to declare that his suspicions must be groundless; when he thought of her brother's hand, he felt that he must shun that fair face and forget that sweet voice. The outcome of these contradictory moods was the conclusion that he must be very careful what he said and did, and must watch and wait patiently for circumstances to strengthen or dispel his suspicions.

As he was thus thinking, lulled by the boy's breathing and by the patter of a light rain on the roof, he fell asleep.

As he slept he was seized by a dream that had the shape and form of a nightmare.

He was oppressed by the feeling that there was some dark and awful presence in the room—something that he could not see or feel, or even guess at, but that was slowly and surely approaching him with the intention of smothering him where he lay.

The presence stood by him and overshadowed him. He tried to speak, to call for help, but could not utter a sound. He strove painfully to burst the bonds of slumber, but was unable to stir hand or foot. He knew he must rise and confront his foe; but a mortal terror had possession of him, and he was as motionless as if bound to his bed.

At last, as he was expecting death and despising himself for his cowardice, the nightmare loosened its grip and he awoke. He drew a long breath of relief and turned his eyes toward the window, to make sure that he was awake and safe.

The night was very dark, and nothing but blackness was visible; but he was sure that there was something or somebody in the room. He was positive that he heard breathing, and knew that it was not the breathing of the boy, as it was like the faint murmuring of some large beast.

A cold chill came over him, but instantly passed off, as he was no coward when he was awake. He was considering whether he should get up and strike a light, when the scratching of a match told him that it was a human being with whom he had to do.

He looked toward the sound, and saw a newly lighted match shine from behind a hand in the

air that was shading it. The hand was a left hand, big and broad, and the little finger was missing.

In another instant the light flamed up, and he knew that Three-fingered Jack had come to perform the task that he had set himself to do.

Lumley felt for his pistol, and was about to spring out of bed, when a dark object moved swiftly and silently along the floor and hurled itself against the tramp, striking him in the stomach.

With a smothered curse and a deep groan, Three-fingered Jack doubled up and fell heavily on the floor.

The next moment the active young typewriter was on top of him, and had turned him on his face, pressing one knee against the small of his back, and holding his wrists crossed.

Perry Wessel, who had been the dark object that shot across the floor, had extricated himself from the heap and hastened to strike a light. Directly a candle was burning on the mantelpiece, and the boy was at the side of his friend ready to assist him in the struggle.

The noise of the fall had aroused Arthur Blackman and his father, who came running into the room—the young man first—and a glance at the open window, and the group on the floor told them what was the matter.

As Lumley, with Arthur's help, was tying the tramp, the deep bark of the watch-dog was heard, and then the sound outside of a hoarse voice in a sort of stage whisper:

"Jack! I say, Jack! Anythin' up, Jack?"

Mr. Blackman stepped to the window and sent a pistol-shot into the darkness at the sound, and another at the rustling of the foliage, as some person broke away and ran from the neighborhood of the house.

By this time Three-fingered Jack was securely bound, and was seated with his back to the wall, where he glared savagely at his captors, but with special spite at George Lumley and Perry Weasel.

"You've done this, you two scalawags!" he said, with a shower of oaths and obscene abuse. "If I don't git even with you fur this, I hope I may be strung up to a tree afore mornin'."

As the boy was evidently terribly afraid of the captured burglar, Three-fingered Jack was dragged down-stairs and consigned to the custody of the hired man, and Mr. Blackman and his son returned to inquire how the intruder had been discovered and caught.

Arthur questioned Weasel, as the speaking partner of the firm, and the boy told a straight and clear story.

"I woke up," he said, "and knowed that was somebody or somethin' in the room; but I was so bad skeered that I couldn't speak nor stir, until the light was struck, and then I was wuss skeered when I saw who it was. I was afeard he would carry me off and kill me, and would hurt Mr. Lumley. So I meant to git ahead of him if I could, and let myself out like a skyrocket. I am a gay young butter, I am, and I socked my head right into his bread-pan. Then Mr. Lumley mounted him, and you come in."

"You are a fine, brave boy," said Arthur,

"and I can tell you that you will lose nothing by this night's work."

Though Lumley had listened to Weasel's story with intense interest, his face was as stolid as if he had not heard a word. When it was explained to him on the slate, he gave the boy both his hands, and patted his frowsy head approvingly.

As Three-fingered Jack was well pinioned, and watched by an armed guard, there was no further danger to be apprehended, and all but the hired man returned to their beds.

CHAPTER VI.

WEASEL AS A JOCKEY.

In the morning the young typewriter had the pleasure of eating breakfast with Lizzie Blackman, and gave himself up to the enjoyment of her presence, doing his best to shut from his thoughts the dark suspicions raised by her brother's maimed hand.

Arthur told her the whole story of the capture of the tramp, and both of them spoke highly in praise of Weasel and his protector. It was hard for Lumley to hear these compliments without blushing, but he played his part well, though he was sorry at the time that it was such a part as prevented him from speaking. But he knew that it was impossible to eat his cake and have it, too, and that he could not have the privilege of being dumb and of speaking when he felt inclined to do so.

He noticed that Mr. Blackman took little part in the conversation about the attempt at robbery, answering briefly when spoken to, and having the appearance of a man who was weighed down by some secret trouble.

After breakfast Arthur Blackman's buggy was brought around, and Lumley followed him into the seat with his satchel, while Perry Wessel found room at their feet.

Neither the typewriter nor the boy asked to be permitted to see the captured tramp, as they had reasons of their own for not wishing to lay eyes on him again.

Mr. Blackman said little at parting, and it seemed to Lumley that he felt relieved at getting rid of his guests. But Lizzie spoke an invitation to come again with her lips and in her manner. Arthur interpreted it to Lumley, who acknowledged it as well as he could in dumb show, and she bowed and smiled as the buggy drove away.

Vinson proved to be a good-sized country town, fairly built up, and kept in decent order, though there were more drinking saloons than one would have thought necessary for the accommodation of the people.

The *Vindicator* office was on the first floor of a two-story frame building, the upper floor being mostly used as lodging-rooms for the employees of the paper. It had the appearance of a neatly-kept country office, with two hand-presses, and a fair allowance of job material. The force then at work was composed of two men and two boys, and George Lumley was to make the third man.

"I've got another hand, boys," announced Arthur Blackman, as he entered the office, "and I think he is a good one. This is the man—George Lumley."

The other two men greeted him, but got no reply to their salutations.

"Oh, you needn't try to talk to him," said Blackman. "He is deaf and dumb."

A short and stout man, Tom Cripps by name, who acted as the pressman of the establishment, as well as a compositor, laid his stick on his case, and burst into a laugh.

"That won't do," he said. "I am not going to have that deaf and dumb game played on me again."

"What do you mean, Tom?" asked Blackman.

"I mean that I have seen enough of that sort of thing. When I was working at a small town over in Illinois, a nice young jour came along, who pretended to be deaf and dumb. The boss set him to work, and he was a good workman, and nobody could find any sort of fault with him; but none of us believed there was anything the matter with his ears or his mouth. We tried all sorts of games to prove that he could hear, and to make him speak; but none of them would work, and at last we had to give it up and set him down as deaf and dumb. He kept it up for about three months, until he took a notion to leave the town. Then, after he had drawn what was coming to him, he bid us all good-by, and could hear and speak as well as anybody."

"What induced him to practice such a deception?" asked the editor.

"Durned if I know. Just to see how far he could carry it, I suppose. Some folks are fond of playing queer games, though there is nothing to be made by it."

Arthur Blackman said that he did not believe his new hand was disposed to play any game, and used the slate to inform Lumley that he might go to work as soon as he wished to.

The typo replied that would prefer to wait until the next day.

"I see," wrote Blackman. "You want to look after the boy. I owe him a suit of clothes, and you must let me fit him out on advertising account. You may go with me and see that the job is done to suit you."

Lumley was glad enough to accept this liberal offer, and Weasel was at once taken to the only clothing store the town afforded, where he was soon supplied with a suit of clothes and such other articles as he would require in his new position.

Arthur Blackman then trotted his new friends back to the printing office, where the boy was sent up-stairs, and directed to wash thoroughly and array himself in his new garments.

He came down with a shining face, and Tom Cripps, who professed to be a good hair-cutter, proceeded to shear off his shaggy locks.

When this job was completed, it was wonderful what a transformation had been effected in Weasel. Cleaned, and trimmed, and decently dressed, he was seen to be a boy of good appearance, with an intelligent face, bright blue eyes, and a form that wanted only a few weeks of sufficient feeding to be quite comely. Barring a little awkwardness, caused by the novelty of his attire, he sustained the character of a respectable member of society very fairly.

"Would you know him, now?" asked Cripps, turning suddenly to George Lumley.

But there was nothing in Lumley's blank face to indicate that he had heard the question.

"He plays it well," muttered Cripps, as he turned away.

Arthur Blackman offered Lumley a chance to lodge at the printing office; but a glance at the rooms made him shake his head, and his employer went with him and Weasel in search of a boarding-house.

They easily found a suitable place, and the typo and the boy moved into their room with their baggage, which consisted of Lumley's satchel and a small bundle belonging to Weasel.

In the afternoon they sauntered out to the grounds of the County Fair, which was in progress near the town, and discovered that a horse-race was on hand.

This naturally attracted both of them, and they were soon mingling with the throngs of people who were collected near the grand stand.

Among those who were prominently interested in the race was Arthur Blackman, who proved to be the owner of Vinson Chief, a horse from whom he expected a great performance. The Chief was a gray horse, tall and gaunt, and anything but handsome, but reputed to possess unusual speed and bottom. He would have been the favorite in the betting, but for a quality that was freely spoken of as "uncertain." It seemed to be the prevalent opinion that he was a wild and vicious animal, and too unreliable to be considered an entirely safe investment.

The race was to be a mile and a half dash, free to all, for a purse of \$300, and it was necessary to circle the quarter-mile track six times.

When Lumley and Perry Wessel appeared on the track, Vinson Chief was being aired by his jockey, who had orders to give him a preliminary canter around the track, and Arthur Blackman was eagerly taking all the bets he could get against the gaunt gray horse.

His confidence seemed to be warranted by the quiet and easy manner in which the gray started off, and by the admirable action of his long limbs.

"This is one of the Chief's good days," said his owner, "and I have a sure thing on him this time."

"You can't allers tell," replied an old farmer. "That's a mighty deceivin' brute of yours."

"A hundred to fifty that he wins this race," said Arthur, ready to back his good opinion of the horse.

"It's a bet," replied the farmer, as he pulled out a roll of bills.

At that moment the Chief was nearly around the track, going steadily and nicely, and completely under the control of his driver.

But, as he drew near the crowd about the grand stand, he suddenly shied, threw up his head, came to a dead stop, and then whirled swiftly around, with his hind legs in the air and his nose to the ground, sending his rider to the earth like shot from a shovel.

A cry went up from the crowd, and there was a rush to the place where the disaster had occurred. The jockey was found to be stunned, with one of his arms broken, and it was the opinion of a physician who happened to be

present that he was injured internally. It was certain that he would not be able to mount a horse while that fair was in progress.

The great gray brute, as if satisfied with the mischief he had done, had not stirred from the spot where he came to a halt, and he was quiet enough as his owner sadly led him down the track, while the jockey was being carried away on a litter.

"That winds me up," said Arthur. "I am more grieved on the boy's account than on my own; but it means a big loss for me, as I am out of the race now, and all my bets are play or pay."

"Cain't you find ary other boy to ride the critter?" asked the old farmer at his side.

"No. There is not a boy left who could ride in this race, and nobody would dare to mount the Chief now, anyhow."

A sharp elbow nudged him in the side. He looked down, and saw Perry Wessel gazing at him eagerly.

"Please let me ride him, mister," begged the boy.

"You!" exclaimed Arthur, in utter amazement. "No, bub; I don't think you are ready to die just yet."

"He can't fling me," insisted Weasel. "That feller oughter ha' gi'n him the stick as soon as he shied."

"Thar's sense in what he says," remarked the old farmer, and Arthur Blackman looked at the boy earnestly.

"Do you really believe you could ride this horse?" he asked.

"I can ride anythin'," replied Weasel, "and I've rid qua'ter hosses afore now."

"But this is no quarter race. You have to run six quarters to win."

"I know that, mister. All I've got to do is to stick on and keep the boss a-goin'."

"Yes, that is *all*, and enough too. Well, it is make or break with me. If you are willing to risk your bones, you may ride the brute."

Weasel pulled off his coat, and in a twinkling was perched on the back of the tall steed. He handled the bridle-rein and the whip in a jockey-like manner, and was fairly in a line with the others when they were called to the start.

There were five other starters, and they got a good send-off, Vinson Chief at the tail of the heap, and dragging behind as they circled around the track. He was evidently in no hurry, and his rider did not seem anxious to press him to his speed.

The gray did not improve his pace when the horses swept around the last turn of the quarter, and Arthur Blackman watched him anxiously, as he drew near the spot where he had thrown his jockey, to see if he meant to repeat the maneuver.

His intention was vicious enough; but, just as he started to shy, Weasel brought the whip down on his flanks again and again, startling him out of his purpose, and sending him flying under the wire at a gait that promised to speedily bring him to the front.

He did go to the front, and was leading the string when they were half around the track; but he again dropped behind, and as he ap-

proached the wire he again attempted to try the tactics by which he had got rid of his first rider.

But Weasel was again too quick for him, cutting him with the whip so savagely that he went over the line at a whirling pace, and once more he led the string. His rider did not again allow him to slacken his pace, but lashed him around the track, keeping him well in the lead to the stand. Then the Chief, with a snort of rage, took the bit between his teeth, and tore down the track at the top of his speed.

"He has run away!" was the general cry.

"Let him run!" said his excited owner. "He is going to win this race."

This prediction seemed likely to prove true, if the boy could stick on the horse, and if the Chief's frenzy should not prompt him to some mad deed that would defy all speculation.

The wild horse went whirling around the track, exciting the others to do their best to overtake him, and Weasel sat him like a statue, his feet well braced, and his hands firmly grasping the rein. At the place of the first difficulty the boy again plied the whip, sending the Chief across the line like a tornado. It was evident that the horse was beyond control; but his headlong course carried him around the track, and the only danger was that he might stop short, or endeavor to bolt the ring.

If he made any such attempt, it was foiled by his rider's whip, which gave him no rest, but kept him at such a rate of speed that he had no time to meditate mischief.

So he circled around the course again and again, far ahead of the others, until he came sweeping toward the stand on the last quarter. Then the question was whether the boy would be able to stop him, and not a voice was heard, but all eyes were fastened on him as he dashed under the wire.

Instantly Weasel had fairly climbed upon his neck, and there he was sawing at the bit, with the rein wrapped around his wrists.

The tall gray horse had had enough, and he suffered himself to be halted, and Arthur Blackman quietly led him away, trembling and panting.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CONVERSION OF TOM CRIPPS.

As Lumley was going home from the race, he saw the figure of a man slinking away in the distance, and thought he recognized it. He pointed it out to Weasel, and the boy's look of consternation said that he, also, thought that he recognized it.

This circumstance weighed upon the mind of the typo, and when he went to the printing-office the next morning, he had a brief slate conversation with Arthur Blackman.

"When are we to be called on to give evidence against the tramp who was taken at your father's house?" wrote Lumley.

"Not at all," wrote the editor after a little hesitation.

"Why so?"

"It seems that my father felt sorry for the fellow and turned him loose."

The typo was obliged to be satisfied with this

information; but he did not fail to caution Perry Wessel at noon.

"Three-fingered Jack is loose!" he said. "That was the man we saw last evening. You must be careful where you go and what you do."

Communication with his benefactor by writing was something to which Weasel did not take kindly. In fact, he had not been able to fully "catch on" to Lumley's deafness and dumbness, supposing those infirmities to have been assumed for a temporary purpose, and that there would soon be an end of them. Consequently, he had of late frequently spoken to his friend as if expecting an answer, and had worn a puzzled look when Lumley took no notice of spoken words.

When he had spelled out the warning on the slate, he wrote this question:

"How long are you goan to be on this lay?"

"What lay?" asked Lumley.

"Can't speak or hear."

"Perhaps a long time. Wait. Be patient, and I will soon teach you to talk to me."

The typo at once began to instruct his young friend in the deaf and dumb alphabet, and it was wonderful how soon the boy picked it up. The desire to converse freely with his protector quickened his faculties amazingly.

George Lumley soon perceived that the question what he should do with the elephant on his hands had been solved easily and satisfactorily. In consideration of Weasel's services in preventing the house robbery, Arthur Blackman had clothed him. In consideration of his services as a jockey, he insisted on paying the boy's board, and made an arrangement to that effect with his landlady. He also entered him at the public school, supplying him with books, and Weasel attacked his studies very vigorously.

The typo got on nicely in the office of the Vinson *Vindicator*. He proved himself a good workman in all branches of the "art preservative," and was well liked by his fellows, with the exception of Tom Cripps, who did not scruple to say that he objected to the new man because he (Cripps) did not intend to be taken in and done for again by any pretended deaf mute.

He was so set in his conviction that Lumley was shamming, that he kept impressing it upon the others in the office, and was constantly trying experiments with the view of proving its truth. So the office of the *Vindicator* was at all times subject to startling questions and exclamations, yells, shrieks, explosions, and all sorts of sudden shocks in the line of noise, calculated to throw the pretended "dummy" off his balance, and to betray his true character.

Lumley bore these assaults so admirably, though they were very annoying to him, and a great strain upon his temper and his strength, that Cripps made no converts.

"But I know he is shamming," insisted the pressman, "and I will prove it yet, or give him my head for a football."

Arthur Blackman grew tired of these persecutions, and ordered that they should cease, as he did not wish his establishment to be turned into a menagerie.

At this the pressman took offense, and proceeded to avenge himself by drawing his pay, and exchanging it for Vinson whisky as fast as

he could, until he was quite unfit for work. But this left more work for the others, and injured nobody but himself.

While he was sunk in this debauch, he developed an unexpected ally.

He came lumbering into the office of the *Vindicator* one afternoon, when the editor was absent, dragging by the arm a disreputable and vicious-looking tramp, who seemed to be strongly disinclined to enter.

"Come in, old boy!" shouted Cripps. "Come in an' prove it, an' I'll stand all th' drinks you wanter stagger under. Come in an' stick to what you tolle me, an' I'll stuff your skin full o' bu'sthead."

George Lumley glanced at them as they entered, and recognized in the unwilling tramp his old acquaintance, Three-fingered Jack.

"What's the matter, Tom?" asked one of the printers, Sam Martin, by name.

"Ain't nothin' th' matter o' me," replied Cripps, as he steadied himself against the imposing-stone. "Yere's a free 'n' independent 'Merican citizen, 'titled to th' 'nestimable privileges o' free speech an' a fair show. He's kinder under a cloud just now—mebbe some p'litile convention's gone back on 'im—but his heart is in the right place emphaticalularly."

"Stow the jaw-snappers," remarked Martin, "and tell us what's the row."

"Your feller-citizen stands before you," said Cripps, with a strong effort at dignity, "in th' sacred cause of truth an' justice, an' a honest man's th' noblest work o' the Constitution, an' I can whip any durned rat who says it ain't."

"Hurry the racket, Tom, and put the stopper in the essence-bottle. I've had enough already."

"This feller-citizen comes ter substantiativato my statemen's of an' concernin' a certain chap over there, known as Dummy. Knows 'im well. Knows 'im all through, down to the 'verted commas. Tramped with 'im through a tooralooral district, comin' to this metrapulis. Knows that Dummy can bear well enough an' talk fast enough when he wants to, an' 'sready to swear to it. Ain't that so, pard?" concluded Cripps, slapping his companion on the back.

"It's as true as Gospill, gen'lemen," said the tramp. "That man over thar—which I know him well—ain't no more deaf and dumb than I am, and I'm willin' to swear to this on a stack o' Bibles."

"Now, Dummy, what ha' you got to say to that?" demanded Cripps, veering toward Lumley.

The young typo, perceiving that he was spoken to, extended his slate, but Cripps pushed it away with an oath.

Sam Martin took the slate, made a brief summary of the tramp's statement, and handed it to Lumley, who wrote this reply:

"He is a thief. I helped catch him when he broke into Mr. Blackman's house. A man who will steal will lie."

Arthur Blackman came in and angrily asked Cripps what he meant by bringing such a loafer into the office.

The fuddled pressman, thrown off his balance, began a confused explanation, and broke down.

"Take him out of here," said the editor, "and take yourself off, too. If you are ever seen in

such company again, Tom Cripps, you will not find another day's work in this office."

In the evening of the day that witnessed this unpleasant scene George Lumley went out for a walk, after cautioning Perry Wessel to stay in the house and stick to his books. He wanted to be alone for a while, that he might consider fully the situation in which he found himself.

He had stopped in Vinson for a purpose, but had as yet done nothing toward the attainment of his purpose. He had made no discoveries that could strengthen his suspicions of Arthur Blackman, but had seen much to cause him to admire the character of that young gentleman. It was singular that Three-fingered Jack had been allowed to go free after his attempt at burglary, and it was singular that Lumley had not again been requested to call at Mr. Blackman's house—a courtesy which should have been prompted by consideration for his services to that gentleman. But he had seen Lizzie Blackman. He had met her in Vinson, and she had been very kind and gracious to him, and had permitted him to walk most of the way home with her. This meeting had made him happy, and his dreams were all of Lizzie.

He was restless and uneasy, because he was making no progress in the search that had led him into so many towns and on so many tedious tramps. But he had found at Vinson the first sign of a clew, and he could not expect to gain anything by aimless wandering. At the same time he was fully aware of the fact that his roving disposition was held in check by the presence of Lizzie Blackman.

Revolving these thoughts in his mind, he reached the river, a narrow, but rapid and turbid stream. It was crossed at that point by a railroad bridge, built upon piles, on which none but the track-walkers were allowed. On the opposite side was a collection of shanties and hovels, to which a pretentious title had once been given, though the hamlet had been known for years by the brief and undignified name of Pultlight.

There was a man on the bridge, and he did not look like a track-walker. Lumley thought that he recognized that short and burly form, and when the moon came out from behind a cloud, he was sure that the walker was Tom Cripps.

The festive pressman was coming from the direction of Pultlight, and his gait was very unsteady. As he staggered from tie to tie, the astonished spectator expected at every moment to see him drop into the river.

Just then an Express train came rattling on the bridge from Pultlight, and there seemed to be no chance for the solitary walker but a choice between death by the cowcatcher and death by drowning. His only hope would have been to let himself down and hang under the bridge until the train went by; but this was a straw that could hardly be grasped by a drunken man.

Tom Cripps heard the danger, and turned to look at it.

That is to say, he tried to turn; but the effort was too much for his equilibrium. He lost his balance, and dropped like a stone into the muddy stream below.

The next instant George Lumley had pulled off his coat and boots, and was in the river, pushing a fence-rail before him.

"Here's help, Tom!" he shouted, forgetting in the excitement of the moment the part he was playing. "Keep up a minute, Tom!"

He had seen at a glance that the heavy pressman was no swimmer, and he struck out with all his strength to reach him before he sunk.

But the drowning man was about to go down for the third time when Lumley grasped his coat-collar, and brought the rail within his reach.

"Get your arms over this rail, Tom, and keep your head above water," directed Lumley, "and I will soon have you safe ashore."

Cripps held on manfully, and Lumley swam stoutly, and soon they were both panting on the bank, a considerable distance below the bridge, while the rail went whirling down the stream.

As soon as they rose to their feet Cripps began to gesture rapidly, in the sign language used by deaf-mutes, and these were the words he spelled:

"You are all right, old boy. I will never forget this. You are as deaf as a post and as dumb as an oyster, and I will swear to it."

Lumley held out his hand, and Cripps took it with a grasp that made him wince.

Then they wrung out their clothes, and walked to Vinson together, and it was plain that the pressman had been thoroughly sobered by his peril and his plunge.

CHAPTER VIII.

A TIGHT PINCH IN PULLTIGHT.

THE young typewriter believed that the night's adventure had gained him a friend in Tom Cripps, and he was quite elated by this thought and he went home.

But a startling surprise awaited him at his boarding-house.

Perry Wessel was not in his room, nor was he in the house.

Lumley, though wishing that he could throw off the character of a deaf-mute, seized his slate, and eagerly questioned the landlady.

She could only tell him that the boy had gone out shortly after dark, and since then she had not seen him.

The typewriter instantly jumped to the conclusion that Weasel had been kidnapped or made away with, and that Three-fingered Jack was responsible for his disappearance. He could form no opinion of the cause that prompted the tramp to try to regain possession of the boy, but felt convinced that such was his desire, and that he had been hanging around Vinson for that purpose.

He sallied out immediately, and made inquiries at every place that was open, and looked in every direction which he thought the boy might possibly have taken; but he could get no intelligence of Weasel, and the moon had set, and the night was so dark and cloudy that he could make no extended search.

There was nothing for him to do but return home and go to bed, hoping that his young friend might come in before morning.

He passed a nearly sleepless night. The va-

grant boy had taken a firm hold upon his affections, and he could not bear the thought that he should be forcibly restored to the wretched life from which he had been rescued.

When morning came, nothing had been seen of Weasel, and Lumley hurried out to renew his search. But no person had seen the boy, and not the slightest trace of him could be found.

Lumley naturally carried his sad countenance to the office of the *Vindicator*, where, somewhat to his surprise, he found Tom Cripps busy at his case. The big pressman was decidedly nervous, but was working resolutely "to get his hand in," and he smiled cordially when his rescuer came in.

The story of Weasel's disappearance was soon told by Lumley to Sam Martin, who repeated it for the benefit of the others.

Then Tom Cripps began some queer antics, that attracted the attention of his comrades. He pulled a long face, shook himself like a dog, rubbed his shaggy head violently, and concluded the performance by covering his face with his broad hands. Then he began to talk to Lumley with his fingers.

"Wait a bit," he said. "Perhaps I can tell you something."

"Hello!" exclaimed Martin. "What are you doing, Tom? If you know that Dummy can talk as well as you can, why don't you shoot your tongue at him?"

"I know that he can't," replied Cripps. "He pulled me out of the river last night when I was drowning, and I am sure that if he had been able to talk he would have yelled to me then."

Then he began the finger conversation again.

"I almost know something," he said, "but can't quite get hold of it. It is about the tramp I brought here yesterday."

"Yes. What of him?" eagerly signed Lumley.

"It was before that time. I met him in the morning, over at Pulltight, and heard him say something; but it slips away when I try to think of it. If I could get just as drunk as I was then, it would come back to me. He was talking with a man he called Buck."

"His partner," said Lumley's fingers.

"They spoke of the boy. I heard the name of Weasel. I think it is coming to me now. Yes—Buck asked the other what he was going to do. 'Bring him over to-night,' said he. That is all I can remember. Perhaps it is all I heard."

"That will do," said Lumley. "I must look for him in Pulltight."

He told Arthur Blackman, to whom the situation was explained by the others, that he would have to take time to search for the boy, and to this there was no objection, as Cripps had returned to work.

Lumley had noticed that his revolver was missing from his room, and he supposed that Weasel had taken it. He asked the editor to lend him one.

Arthur hesitated a moment, and the shade of melancholy on his face drew deeper. Then he unlocked a drawer of his desk, and took out a pistol, which he handed to the typist.

"I never carry a revolver," he wrote. "Here is one which I have not touched in a long time. I am prejudiced against it. But it is a fine pistol, and you must take care of it."

At his boarding-house the young printer examined the pistol that had been loaned to him. He had noticed the expression of Arthur Blackman's face as he looked at the pistol, and had regarded his statement concerning it as at least singular. Why should he have ceased to carry a pistol, and why should he be prejudiced against that particular weapon?

It was a six-chambered revolver, with a rather long barrel, handsomely mounted and with an ivory handle. Five of the chambers were loaded. One of them was empty, but it was easy to see that it was a long time since it had been fired.

A chill ran through the young man as he handled this weapon and noticed its condition. Was it possible that he had in his hands the pistol that had slain his sister? Had the bullet that pierced her heart issued from that empty chamber?

He hastily searched his satchel for the bullet that had been taken from Clara's body, and examined it carefully.

It was of the same caliber, and evidently of the same shape and make as those that Arthur Blackman's pistol carried.

He shuddered as he laid the pistol away, registering a mental oath that if he could prove Arthur Blackman to have been his sister's murderer, he would kill him with a bullet from that very pistol.

He purchased a revolver in town, and started on his quest.

Crossing the river at a bridge above the railroad bridge, he reached Pulltight a little after noon.

That broken-down burg had, in its younger days, aspired to be a city, but had never progressed beyond the aspiration. Streets had been laid out, plots had been printed, the advantages of the location had been extensively advertised, and a great sale of lots had been had. A few pretentious buildings and a number of shanties had been put up, a newspaper had been established, and various drinking-saloons had sprung up like mushrooms.

But Vinson had taken the trade and attracted the population, and had grown steadily while its rival dwindled. The brick buildings proved to be valueless investments, and even some of the shanties were tenantless. The newspaper failed, and the drinking-saloons sunk to grog-shops of the lowest grade. The places reserved for parks were abandoned to brambles and weeds, to cattle and hogs.

The aspiring city with the sounding name had become a disreputable suburb of Vinson—the ditched that drained off the filth and sediment of its population.

It was considered dangerous for a respectable citizen to remain in Pulltight after dark, and hunted criminals fled thither as to one of the cities of refuge of old days.

There was no church in Pulltight, and no street-lamps were there. The policeman knew it not, and the sheriff of the county gave it as wide a berth as possible.

George Lumley was well aware of the reputation of this unsavory suburb; but he had confidence in his ability to keep out of trouble, as well as to take care of himself if he should get into trouble.

Armed with a stout stick, as well as with his revolver, he wandered among the shanties and hovels of Pulltight, keeping his eyes and ears open to every indication that might give him a clew to the whereabouts of Weasel or Three-fingered Jack.

Occasionally he stopped in at a grogery, and endeavored to cultivate the confidence of the shabby proprietor by liberality in the matter of liquor, using his slate with those who proved to be able to read and write. But he soon discovered that his search caused him to be looked on with suspicion, and his inquiries developed nothing but the most stolid ignorance.

As evening approached, having learned just nothing at all in the course of his investigations, he was sauntering down a wretched lane that had once been styled a street, when he saw a man dodge behind one of the shanties that lined the bank of the river.

The brief glimpse that he got of this dodger showed him a resemblance to Three-fingered Jack, and he started in pursuit.

He soon caught sight of the man again, standing at the corner of another shanty, and knew him to be the tramp whom he was seeking. But at the same moment the man seemed to become aware of the fact that he was pursued, and to recognize his pursuer, and he again disappeared. Lumley followed him up sharply, and saw him twice more as he dodged about among the shanties.

It then occurred to the young typo that Three-fingered Jack might be leading him on. If the tramp wished to escape, or to hide, it seemed that he might easily do so; but he appeared to be dodging about for some other purpose. Was he adopting the tactics of the bird that seeks to draw the passer-by from her nest, or was he endeavoring to decoy his pursuer into an ambush?

Lumley continued to pursue this flitting shadow, and soon he plainly saw the tramp enter a rickety frame building that stood at a little distance from the river.

He was convinced that this maneuver was intended to be seen by him, and was then sure that he was being led on.

But this belief did not prevent him from continuing the pursuit. He did not doubt that he was physically a match for Three-fingered Jack, and was of the opinion that with the aid of his weapons he ought to be able to take care of himself. He determined to follow the tramp into his den, to face him there, and to compel the release of Weasel.

Grasping his stick firmly, he approached the house. It was a two-story building, but the upper part was much dilapidated, and the windows of the lower part were closed with board shutters.

Without stopping to knock, he lifted the latch, the door at once yielded, and he stepped in.

The room that he entered was dark, dirty and bare, with the exception of a rickety table, a

broken chair, and an old straw bed that lay on the floor. Neither Three-fingered Jack nor any other person was to be seen.

He stepped forward to the middle of the room, the floor gave way beneath him, and he knew that he was falling.

CHAPTER IX.

MORE TRAPS THAN ONE.

THE typo fell but a little distance, striking on his feet, and tumbling over on a hard earthen floor.

Before he could arise he was seized by two men, and his hands and feet were securely bound. Then he was lifted up and seated on a box, and the dim light of a lantern enabled him to take a view of his surroundings.

The cellar into which he had fallen was dark and damp, about half-filled with boxes and barrels, and had the appearance of being used as a storehouse. A trap-door that hung down from above, swinging on hinges, showed him how he had been dumped into the cellar, and a little light came through the opening. His captors were Three-fingered Jack, and another man of the same quality and style.

While the other raised the trap-door and fastened it with a bolt, Three-fingered Jack stood in front of his prisoner, and surveyed him with a look of malignant exultation.

"Think you're smart, don't you?" he said. "Mebbe you are, but you ain't smart enough fur me, sonny. Nobody but a durned fool would ha' tumbled into sech a trap as this. I've got you now, and mean to settle old scores afore I wipe out w'ot's on the slate."

Lumley made no reply, but gazed defiantly at the man's dirty face.

"Fine feller you are," continued the tramp, "to kerry off my property. That boy's w'u'th too much to me to be let go, and you won't see him no more — not, never, no, more, sonny. Sweet kind of a Christian you are, to go fur to bu'st up my little game. 'Spect you reckoned I'd be sent up fur five or ten year on that job. But I ain't, you see. Joe Blackman is too much of a gentleman to be that hard on a poor feller like me. He knows what side his bread is buttered on, he does."

Lumley thought he could give a guess at the meaning of these words; but he said nothing, and the tramp resumed his taunts.

"So, you're a-playin' of the deaf an' dumb racket; but that's all the good it'll do you. Do you reckon I don't know what kind of a lay you're on? I ain't a bad hand at guessin', I ain't, and thar's more'n one to take a hand in that game. You needn't ter think you kin git out o' this fix, 'cause you're as safe as a fly in a drum, and Buck and I'll go 'long and 'tend to our business. Come, Buck!"

George Lumley was by no means disposed to let the game end in that style. Lack of caution had led him into a scrape, but he meant to try what pluck and skill could do to get him out of it.

Three-fingered Jack picked up the lantern, and the two men disappeared behind a pile of boxes, leaving the cellar in total darkness.

The tramp had told him that he was "as saf-

as a fly in a drum," but he doubted that, and at once began to consider the question of escape.

His feet and hands were tied with leather thongs, and it occurred to him that leather, though strong, cannot be easily tied in a secure knot. Glancing down at his hands, he believed that he could untie those knots with his teeth. If not, his teeth ought to be sharp enough to gnaw the thong. Why had not the fools, he thought, tied his hands behind his back, so that he could not get at them? If he had been incautious, the tramp had also been careless.

Although his sight had become accustomed to the darkness, he could not see the knot with any degree of clearness, and was obliged to feel it with his mouth. It proved to be a clumsy series of common hard knots, and he had not much difficulty in getting them loose. This was only a question of time, and when his hands were free, he easily cast off the bonds from his feet.

He had his liberty; but, what should he do with it?

It would be an easy task to open the trap-door and get out of the cellar by the route that had brought him into it; but he was not quite sure that he wanted to get out just yet. Three-fingered Jack had spoken of Weasel in such a manner as to cause Lumley to believe that the boy was in his possession. If so, might he not be rescued? The young typist, moreover, was of an adventurous disposition, and believed in his ability to extricate himself from dangerous situations. He wanted to "get even" with the tramp who had entrapped him, and was anxious to explore the mystery that lay under the conversation of his captor.

He felt in his hip-pocket for his pistol. It was still there. He was surprised that his captors had not disarmed him, and was satisfied that the balance of carelessness was not against him, though he had so easily tumbled into a trap.

His first thought was that he would conceal the pistol where he could easily reach it, await the return of Three-fingered Jack, and then astonish him to some purpose.

With this view he carefully laid the revolver down behind the box on which he was seated. As he did so, his fingers came in contact with another pistol.

Considerably surprised at this discovery, he lifted both weapons, restored his own to his hip-pocket, and examined the other. It was a six-chambered revolver, and there was something about it that added to his surprise.

There was some carving on the stock that felt like lettering.

On the stock of his own pistol—that which was missing when Weasel disappeared—he had carved his own initials, and his fingers told him that the lettering he was then feeling was similar to that.

This might be a mere freak of his fancy; but he could easily satisfy himself. He had some matches in his pocket, one of which he lighted, and examined the pistol. Yes, there were his initials, G. L., carved on the stock.

It was his pistol—there could be no doubt of that. The presumption was that it had been in Weasel's possession; that the boy had been in

that cellar, and that he had concealed the pistol where Lumley found it. If it had been taken from him, the one who took it would have kept it.

It was also reasonable to suppose that Weasel was still in or about that building, and his friend was not inclined to abandon the pursuit when he was sure that he had found the trail.

He put the two pistols in his pockets, picked up his stick, and started on a voyage of discovery.

The two tramps had disappeared behind a pile of boxes, and there he found a broken door, through which he passed, and entered another underground apartment.

By means of a faint light from some unseen source, he perceived that this room, like the other, was nearly filled with boxes and barrels. But he also saw a plain and stout staircase, leading to the floor above, and knew that by that route the tramps must have made their exit.

He determined to follow them, and to explore the tenement, in the hope of finding Weasel.

Quietly he ascended the stairs, and found a closed door at the head of the landing. Here he stopped short, for the sound of the voices that came from within startled him.

There were evidently two men on the other side of the door, and he was sure that one of them was Three-fingered Jack. The voice of the other he thought that he recognized, to his great surprise, as that of Mr. Blackman, Arthur's father, because it had a peculiar low but penetrating tone.

Directly he was convinced of the correctness of this surmise.

"I tell you now, Joe Blackman," said the tramp, "you hain't got no call to be a-scoldin' of me, or findin' fault with w'ot I see fit to do. Ef you keep your own self straight and out o' trouble, it'll be as much as you kin 'tend to."

Mr. Blackman seemed to take no offense at the tramp's familiar manner and insulting tone, but answered him quite meekly:

"Well, Jack, this is my place, and I must be careful that nothing is done to bring the Viuson people down on it, and I am afraid that this little business of yours may make trouble. That is the reason I ask you why you have picked up that boy and brought him over here."

"Just because it's in the line o' my business. Thar's money in the boy fur me, and I mean to keep him until I kin git out o' him all he's w'u't to me. He hain't got nothin' to do wi' you, and you don't ought to grumble."

"I am not so sure of that," replied Mr. Blackman. "There is one boy that I am interested in, as I don't want him to find his way back to the place he once came from. If this should prove to be the same boy—"

"But it ain't the same boy. Cain't you never take a gentl'man's word fur nothin'? I reckon thar's lots o' lost boys floatin' about. This is a kid I've been on the track of goin' on two seasons, and I've jest got him to rights."

"I am afraid you have got him to wrongs. That young printer will be bunting him up, and he is sure to make trouble."

"You don't need to fret about that chap. I've settled his hash."

"How so?"

"He came over to Pulltight on that very errant, and I led him on, and coaxed him into this shop, and dumped him through a trap inter the cellar."

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Blackman, in a tone that showed great excitement and displeasure.

"That's jest w'ot I did, old man, and it's best for all hands to git that chap hived. Don't you know that his name is George Lumley, and that used to live at Yonkers?"

"Yes: but there is no sense in stirring him up. I let him go along about his business, and you should have done the same."

"But he don't need to be mixin' up in my business, and I owe him a grudge fur w'ot he's done to me afore this."

"You ought to be careful how you get me into trouble, Jack," said Mr. Blackman. "You seem to forget that I let you off when you were taken at my house."

"That be blowed!" exclaimed the tramp. "I don't owe you no thanks fur doin' w'ot you had to do. I know too much of you and your ways fur you to come down on me."

"You had better be careful, Jack Snell," said Mr. Blackman, with rising anger. "Don't provoke me too far, or you will be sorry for it. I know just how much you know, but I also know that I can easily sweep you out of my way, and nobody will be the wiser for it."

"Jest you try it, old twist-and-turn-about," replied the tramp. "Thar's more'n one way to blow the gaff, and it ain't safe fur you to fool with me. But you're a-raisin' a big row about nothin'. I'll take the boy away, and t'other chap won't bother you. I've got him, as I told him a bit ago, as safe as a fly in a drum, and now I'll go down and take a look at him."

"I hope you will be careful, Jack. I will have to ship off a lot of these goods to-night, and this place must be kept quiet."

As soon as Lumley heard the tramp say that he was going to look after his prisoner, he slipped down the stairs, and entered the front room of the cellar, where he hastily moved a box under the trap door, pulled out the bolt, and let the trap fall down. Then he concealed himself behind a pile of boxes, and awaited the arrival of his enemy.

CHAPTER X.

SPOILING A CIRCUS.

THREE-FINGERED JACK came into the cellar room with his lantern, and stopped and stared.

It needed but a glance to tell him that his prisoner was missing, and the condition of the trap showed how the escape had been effected.

He examined the place with his lantern, and discovered nothing but the thongs with which he had bound Lumley's feet and bands lying on the ground floor.

He stamped on the scraps of leather, and spit out another stream of profanity, hot enough to set fire to the flooring above.

Having relieved himself by this exercise, he raised the trap door and bolted it.

"This looks like lockin' the stable door arter the hoss is stole," he said; "but that trap needs to be shot, anyhow. Durned ef this ain't the wu'st little o' fish I've b'iled lately. Ef old man Blackman knowed what had come off, he'd jest

go ravin' crazy. I'm mad enough, my own self, to bu'st my gizzard; but I've got to git even with somebody, and my only show is to take it out o' the boy. I meant to give him a scorcher fur runnin' away, and now his hide 'll hev to pay for this other go."

The tramp started to leave the cellar, but stopped and looked around.

"I'll fetch him down here," he said. "This is the best place to salt him, and his yells won't be likely to rouse any of the neighbors or anybody else. Jerushy! won't I pay him up fur that time he plugged me in the stummick!"

He set down his lantern and hurried out.

"Much obliged to you, Mr. Snell," muttered Lumley, "for arranging your circus so that I can have a front seat. But I suppose I shall have to pay for my ticket by taking part in the performance."

By the light of the lantern the typewriter made his preparations for the conflict he expected.

After the lapse of about fifteen minutes Three-fingered Jack returned, dragging Weasel in by the arm. The boy's face was pale, but he showed no fear. His lips were closed tightly, and the expression of his countenance was that of dogged defiance and determination.

The tramp placed him in the middle of the room, near the boxes behind which Lumley was concealed, and set his lantern where it would throw light on the scene.

To the ambushed printer the picture was a striking one, though by no means pleasant. The dark and dingy cellar, the stout figure of the tramp and the slight form of the boy, the dim rays of the lantern falling on the dark and coarse features of the one and the clean and pale face of the other, the contrast between brute force and courageous weakness—made a scene more peculiar than pleasant.

"Now, sonny," said the brute, "you and me is gwine to hev a beap o' fun together. You are fond o' cirkisses, and we will hev a leetle cirkiss all to ourselves. You are gwine to be the trick mule, and I will be the ringmaster."

Weasel said nothing, and the tramp produced from his coat pocket a stout leather strap.

"Do you see this tickler?" he said. "It'll play a big part in the cirkiss. I'm gwine to give you sech a larrupin' as'll teach you the folly o' tryin' to run away from me. When I fatched you over here, and made you a fine offer ef you would sw'ar ag'in runnin' off, you said you wouldn't do it on no sort o' tarms."

"I meant it, too," defiantly replied the boy.

"So now I'm gwine to settle with you, and pay you up fur the new and the old. I've got you here alone, whar thar cain't a mortal crittur come nigh us, and I mean to jest about skin you alive."

Weasel did not flinch, and the set lines of his face showed that he had made up his mind to the worst.

"You've got to ketch it fur w'ot that dog-goned printer did, too," said Snell. "He kem over here a-buntin' you, the cussed skunk, and I cotched him and hived him right in this hole, and tied him tight; but he got loose and sneaked off."

Weasel's face brightened. It was evidently a

joy to him to learn that his friend had been searching for him, and that he was safe.

The tramp ordered him to take off his coat; but this he evidently could not do, as his hands were tied, and it was necessary to unfasten them to get his arms through the sleeves.

As soon as his hands were loose the boy made a fight for liberty; but the tramp was too strong for him, and soon had him partly stripped and tied, binding him so as to bring him in a leaning position over a box.

"Now, sonny," said Snell, "the cirkiss is gwine to begin, and when it's through thar won't be a bit o' hide on your body that ain't a-sore's as a b'ilie. Yell just as much as you wanter. Thar ain't nobody to hear you but me, and that's the kind o' music I'm fond of."

George Lumley, concealed behind a pile of boxes, had picked up a piece of cord and had tightly bound his penknife to the end of his stick, opening one of the small blades, which was as sharp as a razor.

Three fingered Jack planted himself near the pile of boxes, with his back to his unseen foe, and raised his strap for a cruel, cutting stroke.

As he did so Lumley thrust out his stick from between the boxes, prodded him sharply in the thickest part of his thigh, and immediately drew the lance back to its shelter.

The tramp jumped up with a yell and clapped his hand on the wounded portion of his form, trembling with fright, if not with pain.

He relieved his mind with a string of oaths, picked up his lantern, and carefully examined the floor of the cellar, but saw nothing that could excite his suspicion.

"What in thunder was that?" he asked himself. "It couldn't ha' been suthin' in my breeches. Never knowed any bug to bite like that afore. Was it you, you mizzable young bag-o'-bones? You don't look like you could ha' done it; but thar's no tellin' w'ot such a cantankerous scamp kin be up to. You'll hav to pay for it, anyhow. Dog-gone my skin if I don't fetch blood every lick!"

Again he raised the strap to give effect to his words, and again his concealed foe thrust out his lance.

This time the prod became a stab, and the sharp blade of the knife entered the tramp's flesh nearly its full length.

He howled with pain and sprung up as if he would jump out of his ragged shoes.

"Murder!" he shouted. "Snakes! I'm snake-bit!"

Then he rushed madly through the open door into the back cellar, and could be heard stumbling up-stairs, cursing as he went.

Lumley came out from his concealment, cut Weasel's bonds and raised him to his feet.

The boy uttered an exclamation of joy as he recognized his friend.

"Did you do that, Mr. Lumley?" he asked.

Then, recollecting himself, he began to talk with his fingers.

"Never mind your fingers this time," said Lumley. "Tell me how that rascal got hold of you?"

"Hadn't we better git away from here fu'st!" asked the boy.

"No. He will not be likely to hurry back. If he should, he will be sorry for it."

Weasel told his story. He had gone down-stairs at the boarding-house, to get some fresh air, taking Lumley's pistol as a protection. Seeing a little girl crying over the way, he had crossed the street to learn what was the matter with her. Then he had been suddenly seized from behind by two men, gagged and tied. They carried him through an alley, and across some back lots to the river, where they put him in a boat, and brought him to the old house in Pulltight.

"It was Three-fingered Jack and his partner," said the boy, "and Jack wanted me to take a Bible oath that I'd never leave him ag'in. He told me that if I'd stick to him he'd take me to my father, who is a rich gen'leman, and will give me lots o' good clothes and plenty o' money. I told him that I didn't believe a word he said, and that all the money in the world wouldn't hire me to stay along o' him. Then he cussed me black an' blue, and swore I should never git away from him no more. I reckon I'd ha' been thrashed nigh out o' my skin, if you hadn't been around."

"I did not give that fellow near enough," said Lumley; "but I thought that the easiest way was the best. Come; let us get out of here."

"Say, Mr. Lumley; they didn't git your pistol away from me. I hid it down here in this hole, and I can go right to it."

"Never mind that, Weasel. I happened to find it, and I have it safe. Here it is. You may carry it; but you must not try to use it unless I tell you to. Come with me now."

Lumley mounted a box, pulled out the bolt of the trap-door, and lowered it. Then he lifted Weasel through the opening and swung himself up.

The upper room was empty, and there was no sign of life about the place.

The young printer opened the street door, and looked out.

As he did so, he saw a number of men in front of the house, and found himself face to face with Tom Cripps.

CHAPTER XI.

A TOUGH TIME AT PULLTIGHT.

"THUNDERATION!" exclaimed the big press-man, when he found himself confronted by George Lumley and his companion. "Who'd have thought of running against you two?"

Then, recollecting himself, he began to converse vigorously with his fingers.

At the same time the other men separated, stationing themselves at different points about the old building.

"Never mind that, Tom," said George. "We will talk with our mouths, just now, and on this side of the river."

"Well, Dummy, I am mighty glad to find you safe and sound. What were you doing in that house, and where did you get the boy?"

George explained the situation as briefly as he could, and gave an account of his adventures in search of Weasel, carefully omitting, for reasons of his own, the conversation that he had

overheard between Joseph Blackman and the tramp.

"But what are you doing here, Tom?" he asked. "You seem to have a party with you, too. What brought you to Pulltight again?"

"That's a secret of state. Dummy, my boy," solemnly replied Tom Cripps. "But it will be an open secret very soon, and I may as well give you the rights of it. You know—or, if you don't know, you may accept the assurance of the undersigned—that robberies have been the plague of Vinson for a long time. Houses and stores have been entered, and property has been carried off by the wholesale; yet the police and the other authorities have never been able to get hold of the gang that did the work."

George Lumley thought that he perceived an extensive rat's nest, but kept his thoughts to himself.

"Lately," continued Cripps, "the sheriff of the county picked up a clew. He got hold of one of the gang, and squeezed a partial confession out of him."

"Did he give the names of his pals?" eagerly asked George.

"No; but the sheriff is on the right track and hopes to get at the inside of the whole business pretty soon. The man told where some of the plunder might be found, and the sheriff quietly went around to enlist a *posse come an'-get-us* for service in Pulltight. He came to me, knowing that I was fond of such work, and that I could play a good hand at the game. I gladly jumped in, as I wanted to come over here and look after you and the boy, and here I am. The plunder is in this house, and we hope to get hold of some of the gang here."

The pressman's flow of language was unexpectedly and rudely interrupted.

A dark form stole silently from within the house to the open door, and suddenly rushed out, knocking down Weasel, and nearly overturning Tom Cripps.

George Lumley recognized the shape and gait of Three-fingered Jack as the man ran swiftly up the dark street, and started in pursuit of him closely followed by Weasel.

The young typist ran well, and gained on the tramp; but the latter was thoroughly acquainted with the labyrinth of Pulltight, and turned and wound among the ruins and brambles, so that it was difficult to keep him in sight. George did not dare to fire at him, for fear of arousing a mob of Pulltighters, who would be sure to take the part of the fugitive.

The chase was ended by the sudden disappearance of the tramp, and Lumley and Weasel searched for him in vain, finding not the slightest trace of him.

Then they picked their way back to the old house, where Tom Cripps was still standing guard at the open door.

"The job is finished," said Tom, when Lumley had briefly reported the failure of his pursuit. "Part of the *posse* have gone home, and I was waiting here for you. The sheriff has found lots of plunder, and is as happy as a ward bummer at election time. There will be a big excitement in Vinson over this."

"Did he catch any of the gang?" asked George.

"Not a man. They had all crawled out at some rat-hole, unless the chap who gave us the slip was the only one in the shanty. But the sheriff is on the right track, and is sure of them. Keep mum about that, Lumley, and let us cross over to Vinson."

"Please remember, Tom, that when we get to Vinson I am to be Dummy again."

"All right, my boy; I will make no mistake about that. But I would really like to know what sort of a lay you are on. Are you keeping up this sort of thing just for fun?"

"No, Tom, there is something more than fun in it. It is a serious matter. But I can't explain it now, and I hope you will believe me when I say that it is nothing but what is square and honest."

"I haven't the least doubt of that."

"You won't betray me then, old boy?"

"Betray you? Did you fish me out of the river for that? You may bet your utmost ducat on Tom Cripps!"

When George Lumley reached his boarding-house, he and Weasel retired to rest for the remainder of the night. The boy was soon lost in slumber, but sleep was slow to visit the eyes of the young typist.

The revelations of the earlier part of the night kept his brain active and excited, and both troubled and puzzled him.

He could have no doubt that Joseph Blackman was the leader of the gang of robbers whose storehouse in Pulltight had been discovered and raided by the sheriff. The old man had escaped capture; but Tom Cripps had said that the gang would surely be brought to justice soon.

It was clear that Mr. Blackman had turned the burglarious tramp loose because he was one of the gang, and Lumley suspected that there might be some further reason back of that.

This was no concern of his, the young typist thought. He cared nothing for Joe Blackman, and there was no valid reason why he should not perform the duty he owed to society by giving information to the authorities of what he had seen and heard in the old house at Pulltight.

Yet it was a matter of deep concern to him, and he could not give that information, because the culprit was Lizzie Blackman's father. He felt that Lizzie was his fate; that he could not help loving her, and would never love any but her. Her father's misdeeds could never make him love her less, and for her sake he could do nothing to harm her father.

But her brother? That was a harder nut to crack.

Was Arthur Blackman associated with his father in his unlawful enterprises?

Lumley did not believe that he was. There was something in the young editor's voice and manner and all his ways that seemed to shut out such a suspicion.

Granted that he was clear of that charge, was he the murderer of Clara Lumley?

George hoped that he was not, as he had taken a real liking to the liberal, whole-souled, sad-faced proprietor of the *Vindictive*. But suspicion was strong against him. There was his hand, the very image of the plaster

cast which Lumley had so carefully preserved. There was his pistol, exactly such as that from which the fatal bullet had been fired. Besides, Joseph Blackman seemed to know something about George Lumley who used to live at Yonkers, and had "let him go along about his business."

But these suspicious circumstances might be mere coincidences, easy of explanation. Lumley hoped they were.

Before he dropped to sleep he had formed one determination—that he would go and visit Lizzie Blackman without any more delay.

He wished that he could speak to her and talk freely. He had gained nothing as yet by playing the part of a deaf-mute. But he could not disclose the truth to her then, and confess himself an impostor.

CHAPTER XII.

CLARA LUMLEY'S MURDERER.

THE next morning George Lumley's determination had not wilted, and he proceeded to carry into effect his intention of visiting Lizzie Blackman.

He arrayed himself in his best, and took unusual pains with his personal appearance. He was somewhat nervous about this adventure, as he began to believe that he was coming to the turning point of his life, and that much might depend upon a little.

After giving Weasel a pistol, and cautioning him against allowing himself to be kidnapped again, he set out.

In his walk from Vinson toward the residence of Joseph Blackman, he left the main road, and turned aside into a quiet lane, or "neighborhood road," which would take him directly to the house, saving nearly half a mile of distance.

But fate had decreed that he was never to enter that house as a guest the second time.

He had not come in sight of it when he heard a woman's scream—and a scream of terror and pain.

He at once thought of Lizzie Blackman, and that thought put speed in his limbs.

Running around a bend in the road, he saw her struggling in the grasp of a rough-looking man, whom he easily recognized as Three-fingered Jack, who was holding her by both arms.

Both were so occupied—the girl in striving to get free, and the man in restraining her—that they did not notice the young typist's approach.

"W'ot ails ye, gal?" the tramp was angrily exclaiming. "Don't ye know that I'm a partic'lar friend o' yer dad's? All the same as one o' the fambly. Be quiet, now, or I'll git mad."

But the girl struggled for release, and screamed for help.

Help was right at hand. As Lumley ran up he lunched his left fist into the tramp's face, causing him to loose his hold and stagger back.

The next instant Lumley's pistol was leveled at him, with a threatening gesture.

The scamp stood not upon the order of his going, but took to his heels.

Lizzie was trembling with weakness and ex-

citement, and did not refuse the proffered support of her rescuer.

"I am so thankful," she said. Then remembering his infirmity, she hesitated.

George handed her his slate and pencil.

"So thankful," she wrote. "You came just in time to save me."

"Lucky that I was going to your father's house," he wrote.

She looked surprised, but was evidently not displeased.

He wrote again.

"Let us sit down. You need rest, and it is hard to write when one is standing."

She suffered him to lead her from the road, and they sat down on a log under a large oak.

Lizzie then held out her hand for the slate; but he wrote again.

"I can understand what you say by the motions of your lips, if you will speak plainly and if I may look at them."

She blushed, and the blush was quickly followed by a smile.

"I am so glad of that," she said; "and now I only wish that you could talk to me without the slate. I have been hoping that you would come out to see us, and had expected you; but when I spoke to father about it, he frowned and shook his head."

He was strongly tempted to speak to her, but restrained himself.

"I would gladly have come," he wrote. "Your face has been with me all the time. I have heard your voice every hour. I was nearly crazy to see you, and to-day I meant to make the trial, no matter what stood in the way."

She could not help knowing what these words meant, and she blushed again.

"You are very kind," she said. "You have done me a great service to-day, and I would be glad to see you often; but father is so strange. I will speak to Arthur again."

It was clear to the young typist that she had been taking at least a friendly interest in him, and he felt encouraged to go further.

"I wish," he wrote, "that I could put on the slate just what I want to say to you."

Her eyes drooped and her hands trembled.

"Would it be so hard to write it?" she asked, without looking up.

He held the slate under her eyes, and "I love you" was what she read.

Then she blushed as she had not blushed before, but turned and looked him in the face.

"You must not write that," she said—"at least, not now. You know so little of me, and I—I know so little of you. And there is my father."

"You are not angry, I hope," he wrote.

"How could I be angry with you, when you have done me such a service?"

"May I see you again?"

"I hope so. You may walk with me now toward the house."

A short walk brought them in sight of the house, where they parted. George pressed her hand as he left her, and felt an answering pressure. When he had gone a little way he turned and looked back, and she was doing the same.

He held his head high, and his heart was light

as a feather, as he walked rapidly back to Vinson, reaching his boarding-house in time for a late dinner.

After dinner, not knowing what else to do with himself, he determined to go to the printing office and work for awhile, as he needed occupation to quiet his excited thoughts.

He expected to find the office deserted, as the paper for the week was issued and out of the way, and all hands, including the "devil," were supposed to have gone to a picnic.

But Arthur Blackman was there, and he was not alone. His companion was his father, whom Lumley had never before seen at the office.

They were seated at the table in the composing-room, which Arthur used for business and editorial purposes. There was a stern and repulsive look on the old man's face; but the young editor's countenance wore its usual mild and melancholy expression.

Without a word to either of them Lumley went to his case, hung up his coat, and the types began to click as he worked on a piece of "solid" copy that was already before him.

"I am ready to listen to what you say, sir," said Arthur.

"We are not alone now," replied Mr. Blackman, with a frowning glance at Lumley.

"That young man doesn't count. He is as deaf as a post."

"I am not so sure of that. I have heard it said that he can speak and hear well enough.

"I have heard that story, too. It was told here by a tramp who would swear to anything for whisky. Lumley has been tried in this office in fifty different ways. If there was an imposition it would surely have been discovered. Even Tom Cripps, who was strongly disposed to believe him a fraud, is convinced that he is a genuine deaf-mute."

"If you are sure of this, Arthur."

"I am as sure of it as I am that I am speaking to you now."

"Then I will speak. Of course you know of the seizure that was made in Fullbright last night."

"Of course I do," replied the young editor. "I sent a dispatch to the Cincinnati *Enquirer* this morning, giving all the particulars as far as the affair has gone. Sheriff Magee says that he has a sure thing on catching the scoundrels, and will soon get the whole gang. He is only waiting for a little more evidence."

"He will get it easy enough. But there is one member of the gang, as you call them, whom he will not catch, and that is the leader."

"How do you know that, sir?"

"Because I am the leader, and I will not allow myself to be caught."

"Father! You? Do you know what you are saying?"

"I am in my right mind, and am telling you the plain truth."

Arthur Blackman stared aghast at his father whose face did not relax in its hard and stern expression.

I have been in that business for some years," he continued, as calmly as if he were speaking of a legitimate trade. "I started it here, and have controlled it absolutely. I have managed

it so well that I had no fear of discovery. But it has come out at last, and the only thing for me to do is to get out of the way."

"You, father!" exclaimed Arthur. "Is it possible that you have been the leader of a band of robbers, and that I have known nothing about it? This is too horrible to believe."

Joseph Blackman sneered.

"Is it so very horrible?" he asked. "There are other horrible things in the world. When you shot and killed that girl at Yonkers, that was something horrible, too."

George Lumley wondered that he did not drop upon the floor. His legs shook under him, a chill ran through his body, and then he burned with sudden fever. There was a mist between his eyes and the boxes, and his hand shook so that he could scarcely pick up the type. But he kept clicking them in the stick, lest his excitement should be perceived.

It was true. There was the man who had murdered his sister, the man whom he had sworn to kill.

The others were too much absorbed by their own emotions to notice him.

Arthur Blackman bowed his head on the table, and shook like a man in mortal agony. Then he looked up, and spoke clearly and solemnly:

"You know that I never meant to kill her," he said. "Oh, yes, that was horrible enough; but it was an accident, a misadventure, and God is my witness that I have deeply and bitterly repented of my carelessness."

"You say it was an accident," sneered Joseph Blackman. "As you were the only witness of the girl's death, your word must go for what it is worth."

"Do you not believe me, then?"

"I suppose I must believe you. But let that pass. I merely wanted to hint to you that you have no right to preach to me. You were surprised at what I told you. Where did you imagine my money came from?"

"I thought you had retired from business and were living on your money."

"I have been living on the money of other people—that is what I have been living on. But enough of this. I have told you the plain truth, to prepare you for my sudden departure. I will be safe here until to-morrow. Before daylight I shall disappear."

"I hope you will leave Lizzie with me," said Arthur, in a broken voice.

"I will leave her and the house in your care. You will hear from me in some way before long. Now I must be off, as I have much to attend to."

Joseph Blackman hurriedly left the house. Arthur sat a few minutes at the table, wrapped in thought. Then he arose, and slowly walked out.

CHAPTER XIII.

MORE REVELATIONS.

WHEN the two Blackmans had left the printing-office, George Lumley dropped his composing-stick upon his case.

The room and its contents seemed to swim before his eyes, and he staggered like a drunken man. Pressing his hands upon his forehead he

recovered himself, and sat down at the table in the chair vacated by Arthur.

He bowed his head on the table, as Arthur had done, and for some minutes a tumult of conflicting thoughts and emotions kept his brain in a whirl.

As he looked and stared about, his eyes rested on the table, and on a folded paper which had the appearance of a legal document.

Mechanically he read the writing that was visible upon it, and it bore this inscription:

"Richard W. Jones to Frederick Lyster, deed."

The young typo opened the document and hastily perused it. It exactly answered the description of the deed that had been stolen from Frederick Lyster about the time of the killing of Clara Lumley. There could be no doubt that it was that deed.

George quickly concealed it in an inner pocket of his vest. He only wondered whether it was Joseph Blackman or his son who had left it there.

Hearing steps approaching the door, he sprung to his case, and the types were clicking merrily in his stick when the door opened.

The visitor was Joseph Blackman, who looked on the table, on the floor, and about the room, as if searching for something. He also examined his pockets thoroughly.

"I must have lost it," he muttered, "unless I left it at home."

After casting a suspicious glance at the silent and solitary typo, he again left the printing office.

George Lumley remained a little while after the old man had gone, and then put on his coat and sallied out.

He walked away from town, and up the river bank into the woods. The events of the day had been sufficient to upset his equilibrium and bewilder his brain, and he needed to calm himself down and take a rational view of matters, to be able to decide what he could, should, or ought to do.

He was sure that Lizzie Blackman loved him. He was also sure that her brother had slain his sister. It was true that he claimed the killing to have been an accident, and Lumley was willing, for Lizzie's sake, to give him the benefit of a doubt; but there must be a settlement with him, a final and complete settlement.

But not just yet. There was another matter that pressed upon Lumley, and claimed his immediate attention.

It was clear that Joseph Blackman had stolen, or caused to be stolen, Frederick Lyster's deed. It was in his possession, and he it was who had profited by the theft. It was at least reasonable to presume that the same man had stolen, or caused to be stolen, Frederick Lyster's children, and the young typo felt it to be his duty to find them and restore them to their sorrowing parent.

It was not for nothing, after all, that he had played the part of a deaf-mute, and thus he had gained possession of secrets which could not otherwise come to his knowledge. But he no longer needed to support that pretense, and was ready to declare himself in his true character and act openly and above-board.

When his walk was ended he had resolved to visit Joseph Blackman at his house that night, when he might expect to find him at home, and compel him to declare what had become of Frederick Lyster's lost children. Should he refuse to do so, Lumley determined to prevent his escape from Indian justice.

It was after dark when he left Vinson on this errand; but there was a half moon, which shone occasionally through broken clouds, and gave him light enough to see his way.

He took Weasel along for company, and to make sure that the boy did not fall into any more difficulties. Weasel observed the silent and melancholy mood of his protector, and tried to talk in a lively strain as they jogged along; but nothing he said or did could cheer George Lumley.

When they came in sight of Mr. Blackman's residence a startled exclamation burst from the lips of both.

The house was on fire, and flames were bursting out from the side which they were approaching!

With the wild instinct that prompts a boy to run to a fire, Weasel darted away, and was out of sight before Lumley could stop him.

He, also, hastened on at the top of his speed but he was still at a considerable distance from the house when he discovered the fire, and the flames were darting up from all parts when he reached the spot.

No one was to be seen about the premises but the hired man, who stood in front of the house, stamping and yelling like a crazy person.

Lumley gave this fellow a sound shaking, to bring him to his senses, and sent him off to seek assistance.

Then he darted in at the front door, which the man had left open after his own exit, and hurried from room to room, seeking the inmates.

At last he found Lizzie Blackman and one of the women servants, cowering in an up-stairs room, frightened by the flame, and nearly suffocated by the smoke, and so confused that they did not know which way to turn.

He saw them safely down the stairway, which had already been attacked by the fire, and escorted them to a place of security at the side of the road.

Then he returned to see what could be done for the burning building and its contents.

There was nothing that could be done. A number of the neighbors had arrived, and they succeeded in bringing out a few articles of furniture; but there was no hope of saving the house, which was of wood, and burned rapidly.

Lumley looked among the gathering crowd for Arthur Blackman, and at last found him. He was running about frantically, inquiring for Lizzie and his father.

As the young typo was not ready, under this change of circumstances, to disclose himself in his real character, he took his employer by the sleeve, and led him to where Lizzie was seated at the side of the road.

"Thank God that you are safe, Arthur!" she exclaimed. "Where is father?"

"I do not know," sadly answered the young

man. "I was with him in his private room, where we were conversing on business matters. We noticed a strong smell of smoke, and soon the light out doors told us that the house was on fire. He had locked the door on the inside, but something was the matter with the lock, and the key would not turn. At last I threw up a window, and jumped out on the lawn. He said that he wanted to get something out of his safe, and would follow me immediately. I do not know why he should not have escaped. He had plenty of time and opportunity. He must have got out. But I have not been able to find him."

When Lumley returned to the scene of the conflagration, the roof of the house had fallen in, and the flames had full sway. After awhile a fire-engine from Vinson came lumbering up, but found nothing but ruins to play upon.

The handsome residence was totally destroyed, with most of the outbuildings. The horses and cattle were saved, but scarcely anything else of value.

Lizzie Blackman had been taken by Arthur to the house of a neighbor who had offered them shelter, and Lumley, unwilling to intrude upon her in a time of trouble, set out to return to Vinson, accompanied by Tom Cripps.

They had not gone far when George began to be worried about Weasel, as he had not seen the boy since he started to run to the fire, and he spoke of his fears to Cripps.

"Oh, those boys!" replied Tom. "You can't keep the run of that sort. They are always where they ought not to be. But you may bet your life that they, like the cats, always come down on their feet."

"But I am afraid for him, Tom. Go back with me, and let us take a good look for him."

"Hold up, Dummy! I think that's his voice."

Yes, it was his voice. George Lumley at once recognized the shrill cry that pierced the midnight air.

"There he is! Stop him! Stop him! This way, quick! Help! Help!"

A man came stumbling through the brush, and after him bounded a boy, who leaped upon him as he ran, seizing him by the throat, and fairly winding his arms and legs about him.

Lumley was sure that the two were Three-fingered Jack and Weasel, and ran to them at the top of his speed, Tom Cripps lumbering after him.

The tramp, unable to strike the boy as he clung, was clawing at him in the effort to throw him off, but as Lumley came up, the clinging Weasel tripped the big vagabond, and he fell backward on the ground, with the boy on top, and in a moment Lumley and Tom Cripps had his hands tied behind his back with a handkerchief.

"That's him!" said Weasel, as he stood up, panting for breath, his face bleeding, and his clothes nearly torn from his back. "That's him! I cottedched him! Don't you let him go, fur any money."

"What is the matter, Weasel?" asked George.

"That's the cuss who set fire to the house up yonder. I see'd him jest arter he'd started another fire on t'other side. Then he started a fire ag'in the barn. I stomped that out, and

watched him. He laid around in the bushes till the house was burned down, and then sneaked off. I followed him, and when I caught sight of you fellers I hollered to you, and then I bounced him."

Lumley looked at the tramp, who had been placed in a sitting posture, with his back against a tree.

"So this is what you have brought yourself to at last, Dick Snell," he said.

"How did you git hold of my name?" demanded the tramp.

"Oh, I know it well enough, and I know all about you. I was going to see Joseph Blackman this night, to make him tell me what has become of Frederick Lyster's children; but I have an idea that you know more about it than he does."

"The blazes you have!"

"Yes, that is my opinion. This is a bad scrape you are in, Dick Snell. Setting fire to that house is sure to land you in the penitentiary, and if Mr Blackman was burned, as there is reason to believe he was, it is a hanging matter."

The tramp stared about bewildered, as if seeking a way out of the difficulty.

"Seems like you've been too much for me every time, young feller," he said; "but I believe you are squar'. If I tell you the honest truth about those young ones, will you let me go?"

"What do you say, Tom?" asked Lumley.

"This is your job, Dummy. I will agree to anything you say."

"Very well. I will turn you loose, Dick Snell, if you will tell me the truth and the whole truth about those children. But if you lie to me, I will know it. I warn you of that."

"Oh, I will give it to you straight enough. You are George Lumley, who used to live at Yonkers. Do you want to know who killed your sister?"

"No; I know that. Tell me about the children."

"I stole 'em, both of 'em. Joe Blackman paid me to do it, and I have made him stake me now an' then when I wanted money. I knowed he was goin' to light out, and I struck him heavy; but he went back on me, and I set fire to his house out of spite."

Under Lumley's questioning the tramp gave the dates and particulars of the disappearance of the children, leaving no doubt of the truth of his story.

"Where are they now?" asked the typist.

"One of 'em is that imp thar, standin' by you."

"I thought so. And the other?"

"T'other one passes for Joe Blackman's daughter, and he calls her Lizzie."

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Lumley. "She is not touched by Joseph Blackman's sin or Arthur's fault. Now, Dick Snell, who stole Mr. Lyster's deed?"

"I did, and gave it to Arthur, who was sent thar to git it. But he didn't know nothing about it nor any of the rest of the old man's jobs."

"I believe you. You may go now, and you had better get far away from here."

CHAPTER XIV.

CONFESSTION AND ATONEMENT.

WHEN George Lumley and Weasel reached their boarding-house in Vinson, the boy was anxious to know more about the mysterious affair in which he had been involved.

He could not understand why the incendiary tramp had been turned loose, and he had perceived that he was alluded to in a manner that excited his curiosity. Consequently his questions were frequent and pointed.

Lumley put him off, merely assuring him that he was "in luck," and saying that they were both tired and needed sleep.

"Have patience for a little while," said he, "and you will know all about it. But I may tell you now that you will be a poor boy no longer."

They both slept soundly, in fact, did not awake until a late hour in the morning.

Lumley's first task in the morning was to send a telegram to Frederick Lyster, requesting him to come on to Vinson at once, as both his children were found.

He then sauntered about town, hearing the comments of the people of Vinson upon the fire and other recent occurrences. They were much excited, and the wonder was what had become of Joseph Blackman. It was generally supposed that he must have been lost in the fire, though no trace of him had been discovered.

The sheriff, however, shook his head and looked wise, hinting that there were other ways of disappearance than burning buildings, and that more persons than one might have good reasons for disappearing.

When Lumley went to the printing office, he carried upon his person the pistol that had been loaned to him by Arthur Blackman. He took his place at his ease as usual, and waited for his employer.

But Arthur did not make his appearance until the middle of the afternoon. He had been occupied with caring for Lizzie, and with directing a search of the ruins of the house for his father's remains.

When he came in he sat down at his table, but was exhausted, broken down, and evidently incapacitated for work.

Lumley put on his coat and hat, went to the table, and wrote these words on his slate:

"I am anxious to have a conversation with you, in some quiet place where we will not be interrupted."

"Will you go up-stairs?" wrote Arthur, in answer.

"I would prefer to see you outside. This is a matter of importance. It concerns your sister."

"I will go wherever you wish."

Arthur Blackman took his hat and cane, and followed the young typist out of the office.

In silence, and without looking at each other, they walked away from Vinson, and up the river into the forest that lined the eastern bank.

When they had reached a secluded spot, Lumley stopped and seated himself on a stone. Arthur took a seat on a log opposite him, and looked at him inquiringly.

"Mr. Blackman," said Lumley, "I am no more deaf and dumb than you are."

The editor started at the sound of his companion's voice, and changed color, but recovered himself instantly.

"Then you heard everything that my father and I were saying yesterday," he remarked.

"Of course I did; but that need give you no uneasiness. Most of it was already known to me."

"Why have you been playing this part? Perhaps you are some sort of a detective."

"I am, but only on my own account. My name, as you know, is George Lumley. I once lived in Yonkers, and had a sister."

Arthur Blackman started again, and turned ashy pale.

"So it was your sister," he said, faintly. "My father was right, then."

"Yes; but it is not of her that I wish to speak now. I think you need not worry about your father. In my opinion he is alive and far from here. I would also advise you not to grieve over his criminal career, which need not touch you. The evil deeds of which he told you were only a part of the wrong he has done, and perhaps not the greatest part. I wish to speak to you now of her whom you have supposed to be your sister."

"Supposed to be my sister?" exclaimed Arthur. "What do you mean by that? But I am ready to believe anything now."

"Your father," said Dumley, "was formerly in business in New York with a gentleman named Frederick Lyster. He swindled his confiding partner, who exposed him and caused his arrest; but he escaped punishment. Angry at the exposure, he sought revenge by causing Mr. Lyster's two children to be stolen away, first the little girl and then the little boy. The most thorough search failed to discover them, and to this day their father has seen or heard nothing of them. Joseph Blackman's tool in that villainous business was the same tramp whom we caught breaking into your house here awhile ago. The same rascal afterward stole from Mr. Lyster's house an unrecorded deed, and gave it to you, at a time you have good reason to remember."

"How could I help remembering?" replied Blackman. "I received the paper; but, as God is my judge, I never supposed that there was anything wrong about it."

"Your father had blinded you, no doubt. The theft of that deed caused Mr. Lyster to lose a large sum of money."

"These are terrible things that you tell me; and yet I am bound to believe you. But what have they to do with my sister Lizzie?"

"It was only last night," answered Lumley, "that I learned what had become of Mr. Lyster's two children. They are both alive and well, but have had widely different fortunes. One of them is the vagrant boy I picked up on the road, and to whom you have been so kind. The other has been known as Lizzie Blackman, and you have believed her to be your sister."

Arthur Blackman rose unsteadily from his seat, and pressed his hands to his forehead.

"I must have time to settle this in my mind," he said, "and there is a matter of business of much importance which I must attend to before the day is done. Let me go back to town, I can-

ley, and I will meet you here again at seven o'clock this evening."

"I have no right to binder you, Mr. Blackman," replied George, surprised at his employer's tone.

"You have that right. I am at your command in everything. I ask this as a favor. As sure as God lives and justice reigns I will meet you here at seven. Bring that boy with you—Lizzie's brother."

Arthur Blackman hastened away toward Vinson, and after a few minutes George Lumley slowly took the same direction.

At his boarding-horse Lumley found a telegram awaiting him from Frederick Lyster, who said that he would take the first train to the West.

The young typo did not go to the printing office again, as he did not wish to meet Arthur Blackman then.

He passed the time in telling Weasel the story of his father, and explaining to him by what chances he had been discovered. At the same time he cautioned the boy to say nothing about the matter to any one until the arrival of his father. Weasel was overjoyed by his good fortune, and promised to obey his protector in every particular.

As the appointed hour approached, Lumley set out for the place of meeting, accompanied by the boy. He had on his person the pistol to which his bullet fitted, and carried a small package carefully wrapped up.

As they drew near the woods they saw Arthur Blackman walking before them, and when they reached the appointed place he was there, seated on a log.

He was pale and careworn, and a deeper shade of melancholy rested on his face than it had yet shown. But he spoke clearly and firmly:

"My mind is settled now, Lumley," he said. "I have no longer any kith or kin in the world. Nobody belongs to me and I belong to nobody. I am glad that you brought the boy here. I would like to make some atonement to him for the wrong my father did him; but that would be useless, as he will soon be restored to his me."

"He will be well cared for," replied Lumley, "That is a consolation to me. Now, George Lumley, we must speak of your sister. You know that it was I who killed her."

"I know that. I strongly suspected as much before yesterday. Look here," continued Lumley, as he unwrapped his package. "This is a plaster cast of the hand-print that was left in mud. It is your hand. Here are the measurements of the footprints. They will fit your feet."

"That is true." "Here is the bullet that killed my sister, and this is your pistol, from which the bullet was fired."

"You are right. That is the pistol which fired the fatal shot. It has never since been used. I killed your sister, George Lumley, but, as I told my father yesterday, it was an accident, a misadventure. I do not wish to defend or excuse myself; but you must listen to the whole truth. I was sent by my father to

Yonkers to get a paper that would be handed to me by a man whose description I had. I was passing through a little grove when I saw a rabbit seated on a stump. I wished to try my new pistol, and kneeled down and aimed carefully at the rabbit. I saw the fur fly as I fired, but at the same time I was startled by a shriek.

"Horrified at what I might have done, I ran forward, and saw a young woman lying on the ground among the bushes. She had a few wild flowers in her hand, and blood was flowing from her breast where my bullet had struck her. She was dying, and I had hardly reached her when she breathed her last."

"I bent over her to make sure that she was quite dead, and then fled from the accursed spot. I was crazed by what I had done, and only the instinct of flight was left to me. I took the first train that went north. I made no effort to ascertain the name of my victim, and did not look at a newspaper for weeks. Lately my father told me that her name was Clara Lumley, and then I began to connect that name with yours."

"Now, George Lumley, there is but one thing left. I have rid my breast of the secret that has been torturing me so terribly. Here is the pistol with which I killed your sister. Take it, George Lumley, and shoot me as I shot her."

"I cannot do that, Mr. Blackman. I believe what you say, and am willing to forgive the deed, though I cannot forget it."

"Do you forgive me, then?"

"As I hope to be forgiven."

"I wish I could forgive myself. See, Lumley, this chamber of the revolver has been empty since that shot was fired. I have a cartridge that fits it, and I will load it now, in token of your forgiveness, and the pistol shall be yours. I have something in my pocket for you, but will not give it to you just now. Look! is not that somebody coming into the wood from below?"

Lumley and Weasel turned to look in the direction indicated.

As they did so the loud report of a pistol startled them, and they jumped up.

Arthur Blackman had fallen to the ground. His right hand grasped the pistol, and there was an ugly hole in his temple. He had shot a bullet into his brain, and in a few moments he was dead.

"Forgiven!" was the only word he murmured.

Lumley sent Weasel to Vinson for assistance, and remained by the body until a physician and others came to take charge of it.

CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

GEORGE LUMLEY thought that he would visit Lizzie Blackman that night, and explain to her the circumstances that led to Arthur's death; but on reflection he decided that he would not do so. There would be plenty to break the ill-news to her, and after a night's rest she would be better able to bear what he had to tell her.

The next morning the inquest on the body of Arthur Blackman occupied his time.

He told his story plainly and fully, including all his connection with the deceased and the

circumstances that led to his death. In respect to the suicide he was supported by the testimony of Weasel, and the jury rendered a verdict in accordance with this evidence.

As soon as the inquest was over, Lumley procured a horse and buggy, and drove out to the farm where Lizzie Blackman was temporarily sheltered. He found her alone in the sitting-room of the farm-house. It was easy to see that she was in sore distress, and she received him coldly, as if doubtful whether she ought not to consider him the author of her misfortunes.

Her displeasure increased when he spoke to her.

"What, sir?" she exclaimed. "Are you not a deaf mute, then? What sort of an imposition is this that you have been practicing on us, and for what purpose?"

"For a good purpose, I assure you, I assumed the role of a deaf detective," he calmly replied.

"It seemed to have been a purpose that caused the death of my brother."

"Your brother is not dead."

"Do you know what you are saying? I have been told, and by more than one, that my brother shot himself last night in your presence."

"Arthur Blackman shot himself; but he was not your brother, and you are not Lizzie Blackman."

"Not Lizzie Blackman! Do you deny that I am myself? Have you gone crazy? What do you mean, sir?"

"Please listen to me patiently for a little while, and I will explain everything to you."

She listened, and Lumley told her his entire story, connecting it with that of Frederick Lyster, and bringing the narrative down to the death of Arthur Blackman.

She was greatly moved, and at times she wept; but finally she dried her tears, and looked at the young man with her former friendly and trustful expression.

"I hardly know whether to be glad or sorry," she said. "I am both glad and sorry. I have always believed that Mr. Blackman was my father, and have respected him as such, though I cannot say that I really loved him. But Arthur was like a brother to me, and I could not have loved a real brother better than I loved him, nor could I have mourned a real brother more deeply than I mourn him."

"His death has grieved me also," said Lumley. "I had no idea that he meant to kill himself, and I would have saved his life if I could. But you should be comforted. Your real father is one of the best men in the world, and he will soon come here to claim you. Your real brother is in Vinson, and I am sure that you will love him when you come to know him."

"That ragged vagrant who came to our house with you when I first saw you—is he really my brother?" asked Lizzie.

"Yes; and a very bright and lovable young fellow he is, too. He is rough and untrained, but will soon get over that, and you will be proud of him."

"I want to see him right away. Will you drive me into Vinson?"

"With the greatest pleasure."

"Wait for me, then. I will be ready in a few minutes."

Lumley took Lena Lyster, no longer Lizzie Blackman, to his boarding-house, and left her there, while he went to fetch Weasel, or Willie Lyster, from his school.

Lena at once took her young brother in hand, and busied herself in dressing him to suit her taste, so that his father should find him looking trim and neat. As Lumley had predicted, she was proud of him when she came to know him.

The next morning Frederick Lyster arrived from the East, and was introduced by Lumley to his children.

The meeting was a joyful one on all sides, and the happy father, when he had heard all of Lumley's story, overwhelmed him with praise and thanks.

"You have more than made my fortune," he said, "and I must do something to show that I appreciate the good work you have done. As far as money goes, my boy, you shall be independent."

"I am pretty independent as it is," replied George. "At the inquest on the body of Arthur Blackman, a sealed envelope was found in the breast-pocket of his coat, addressed to me. It contained his will bequeathing me all his property, as a partial atonement, he said, for a great wrong he had done."

It was afterward ascertained that the property to which the young typo had thus fallen heir consisted of the *Vindicator* office, a bank account, and considerable land which came to Arthur Blackman from his father who was supposed to be dead.

Lumley had his doubts as to whether Joseph Blackman had really perished in the burned house; but it was the general belief that he had, and as a matter of fact he was never again heard of by any one in that vicinity.

Mr. Lyster remained at Vinson a week or so, to assist his young friend in settling his affairs.

Before this task was completed he saw indications which convinced him that Lumley had found a way of his own to reward himself for his services, and he had a long private interview with Lena.

George Lumley was finally called in to assist at this interview, and he found Lena blushing and her father smiling.

"Well, young gentleman," said Mr. Lyster, "there seems to be something like a mutual understanding between you and this young lady. You have found my daughter for me, and now you want to keep her for yourself."

George admitted that that was the dearest wish of his life.

"It must be granted then, I suppose. You have earned her, and you may have her. But you shall not take her from me entirely. You must go to Yonkers with me, and you and Lena shall have the land that is covered by the deed you saved for me."

Before Lumley left Vinson he executed a lease of the *Vindicator* office to Tom Cripps, cautioning him to leave liquor alone, and requesting him on all suitable occasions to defend the memory of Arthur Blackman.

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